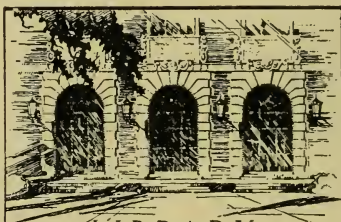





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CONFESSIONAL OF VALOMBRE.



A ROMANCE.

Printed by Lane, Darling, & Co. Leadenhall-Street, London.

Eliza Giffard
THE

CONFESSIONAL OF VALOMBRE.

A Romance.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

LOUISA SIDNEY STANHOPE,

AUTHOR OF

MONTBRASIL ABBEY; THE BANDIT'S BRIDE; STRIKING
LIKENESSES, &c. &c.

Oh, such a deed.

As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul; and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words!

SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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LEADENHALL-STREET,

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THE

Confessional of Valombre.

CHAP. I.

Expectation stood in horror.

MILTON.

.....

The modest virtues mingled in her eyes,

Which, like the dewy star of evening, shone in tears.

THOMSON.

ANXIOUSLY did Theodore listen for the deep breathing of forgetfulness. He saw the inebriated troop retire for the night; he saw each door fast closed, and heard the chime of midnight swell midst the arch-roofed passages; yet did caution

restrain his steps, and check the native impetuosity of his character.

As he gazed around his sombre chamber, peering each corner of its darkened extremities, the peculiar occurrences connected with the mysterious visitation of the stranger, crowded upon memory; the warning so solemnly given—the forbodance of murder—and, lastly, the solicitation for another's safety. He was perplexed; he was doubtful whether to attribute it to supernatural or human agency: the more he thought, the more he became agitated; and when, at the expiration of an hour, the hollow-toned clock tolled one, he started as though the shadowy figure of the monk stood before him. Smiling at the momentary indulgence of fear, he grasped his lamp, and, spurred by reflection almost to the maddening

maddening pitch of desperation, pushed open his door, and hurried down the gallery.

With light step he stole past the chamber of Montauban ; but when he reached the head of the staircase, he paused, irresolute. Short was the self-communion. If, from the sepulchre's verge, armed with retributive power, an avenging spirit could speak the deed of murder, wherefore to him should it unfold its awful mission ? wherefore haunt the quiet calm of unoffending innocence ? 'twas the murderèr it should daunt ; 'twas the murderer, whose guilty head should shrink in atonement. It came not to solicit the consecrated rites of interment ; it came not to point out the mouldering relics of its bones ; for never had it breathed a hint concerning itself. If a

perturbed spirit, why should it so unceasingly watch o'er the fate of others? why should it ever caution against the threat of danger?

Theodore was lost: but when to human interference he traced the mystic riddle, the more was he bewildered in the chaos of wild ideas. 'Twas evident no intercourse subsisted between the unknown and the banditti; for his appearance conveyed alarm, and the threatening accents of his voice ever spread terror and dismay; besides, he had cautioned him against Montauban, and pronounced him *accursed, and fatal as the blast of death*.

Theodore, occupied in reflection, had reached the low portal opening into the court-yard. No shadow had darkened his path; no voice had whispered perseverance;

verance ; yet, firm in the determination of sifting the mystery, he drew aside the bolts, and the door instantly yielded to his impetuous pull.

The night-breeze gathered round his lamp ; yet, carefully shielded with his hand, did it resist the attack. Triumphant he bore it across the court-yard ; nor did he once look up till he drew near the lengthened shadow of the archway.

Again he hesitated : desolate was the aspect ; unlike the preceding night, the moon was obscured, save, ever and anon, when penetrating the darkened vapours gathering o'er her disk, she darted the partial efforts of her splendour. Mournfully waved the mantling foliage of the briony ; and shrill sighed

the wind midst the poisonous intertexture of fumatory and night-shade.

Neglected, forsaken, falling into decay, the watch-tower, blackened by the rust of time, o'erhung the castle's ponderous gateway. It was of circular form, high and turretted; guarded externally by the moat, and extending round the main building in a rampart, once fortified, but now exhibiting but the loop-holed emblems of former defiance, terminated on the opposite side in a similar tower.

Theodore, with suspicious glance, eyed the archway: light was his tread, and frequent his pause to listen; but no sound broke upon the stillness of night; nor, till he penetrated its thickest gloom, did he trace the slightest indication of
his

his mysterious inviter. Then he momentarily caught the shadowy figure of the unknown, as it glided swiftly before him; and then his heart again sank in doubt, for the well-known voice articulated—"Extinguish your lamp, and then advance."

"A stranger to the passage," answered Theodore, "how can I brave utter darkness?"

"Comply, or relinquish the design," was the response.

Still Theodore hesitated, and still the lamp illumined the interior of the archway.—"With religion for your shield, and integrity for your breastplate, what have you to fear?" demanded the unknown.

"Treachery and the assassin's poniard," replied the youth.

“ Treachery, last night, might have completed its aim,” rejoined the voice ; “ and for the assassin’s poniard, that lies sheathed in the girdle of Montauban.”

“ Again my father,” faltered Theodore ; and the bitter reflection of his hopeless prospects fresh nerved his perseverance ; for, with a courage rebraced, and a mind unshrinking, he instantly extinguished the lamp, and cast it on the earth. “ I am ready,” he exclaimed, in the quick accents of desperation ; “ whether to advance or retreat, my movements await your bidding.”

“ Proceed to the foot of the staircase,” resumed the voice ; “ then fear not, but ascend.”

“ I am no coward,” said Theodore, groping along the damp wall of the archway.

“ Heaven

“Heaven be your recompence !” murmured the voice ; and then a hollow sigh echoed through the ruin ; and then it concluded—“May the measure of mercy be returned threefold on the head of the bestower !”

More than ever tranced in wonder, Theodore mounted the stairs. The ascent was difficult ; for time had worn the footing, and darkness veiled the devastation of its reign.

On reaching the last turning, for the flight was spiral, a ray of light, darting athwart the gloom, fell on the black garments of the monk, for the cowl and scapular proclaimed him a brother of some religious order. The glance was momentary ; for though the ray of light continued, still when Theodore reached the spot, the figure was gone ; no sound betrayed

his removal, or spoke the direction of his flight.

“Strange,” he thought; and then loudly he demanded “what was to close the enterprise?”

“Tread softly,” said the voice, “nor shrink from the prison of misery. To the left is the iron grating which closes on the being you must save.”

Theodore, still groping his way, turned a sharp angle, and caught a glimpse of the figure preceding his steps. “Whither do you lead me?” he demanded. “Stay, stranger.”

But the voice again bid him be silent; and again it breathed a sigh of the most piteous sadness. “Father of Heaven!” aspirated the youth, and then he started with new-fraught wonder; for the voice, pronouncing his name, bid him look
through

through a high grating, whose trellised bars emitted a feeble stream of light.

Theodore, whose imagination was wound up almost to the fevered pitch of frenzied expectation, pierced with eager eyes the interior of the grating. A half-circular chamber was the limitation of his search, undecorated, unmarked, save by the rude bars of detention, which, securing each narrow casement, spoke the dire cell of slavery. A lamp was suspended from the ceiling, by the aid of whose partial rays he distinguished a human form, reclining on a rude pallet on the opposite side. It was a woman—neglected—injured—persecuted. Holy saints! was it—could it be Juliette? what other being could his heart picture? what other image could

his eyes behold? Glowing was the tide of rapturous emotion! vivid the flush that mantled his cheek! Juliette trembled on his lips; and then he scarcely breathed, for he heard a struggling sigh, and he saw an arm, white as the cygnet's down, thrown on the contrasting darkness of the coverlet. Still the lamp's envious shadow mocked his discrimination of the features; and still vain, though bordering on agony, was his solicitude to destroy or confirm his fears.

“She slumbers,” whispered the voice; “behold her; view her well. Balmy is the sleep of innocence!”

It sounded almost at his ear, and yet he answered not; he heard the quick breathing of his guide, and yet he turned not: fear was suspended, curiosity lost; he

he dwelt—he lived, but in the supposed dungeon of Juliette. “ ’Tis her I would bid thee save,” resumed the unknown.

“ Save !” echoed Theodore ; “ God of Heaven ! yes, lady—Juliette—I will save thee, or perish !”

“ Hush ! hush !” said the voice ; but the caution was too late, the sleeper was awakened ; she started from her pillow—she looked around her prison ; and Theodore, in one glance, beheld, not Juliette, but a being equally young, equally lovely. His respiration became more free, yet his interest scarce sustained a diminution, as he gazed upon a countenance which meekness and sorrow had touched with an expression almost celestial. He saw the pale tint of her cheek fade to the lily’s whiteness, as he marked the melancholy languor of her

azure

azure eyes directed towards the grate; and then he retreated, for a half-shriek of amazement and horror betrayed her observation of his station.

Theodore, fearful to alarm, yet eager to express an interest in her sufferings, stood in momentary irresolution, when the voice, in a low whisper, said—" 'Tis for you to sever the bars of detention."

"Direct me—guide me," exclaimed Theodore, yielding to the decision of his feelings, and shaking, with Herculean gripe, the iron-incrusted door.

The captive shrieked in terror; and again the voice cautioned Theodore to desist.—"I would but snatch her from the coward grasp of power," rejoined the youth. "Stranger, you who with mystic caution led me hither, stand forth; behold the being I would save; the purity

city of Heaven dwells in her looks ; yet man, relentless man——.”

“ Montauban,” mournfully interrupted the voice.

“ Again my father,” faltered Theodore ; and yielding to the ardour of his feelings, he sprung to the spot from whence the sound proceeded ; but still the monk, if monk it was, eluded his search.—“ For what purpose am I conducted hither ?” he demanded. “ Wherefore, if yon hated barrier yields not to my strength, am I called upon to save ?”

“ Caution and perseverance, not strength, is required,” said the unknown. “ In the girdle of Montauban is the key to liberty : Theodore, ’tis you alone can procure that key ; ’tis you alone can loosen the bars of detention. Return,
whisper

whisper peace to the oppressed ; visit her with hope ; and leave to stratagem the moment of delivery.”

Theodore again approached the grating ; he looked into the chamber ; the captive had quitted the hard couch on which she had sought repose ; and, as she stood in the attitude of listening attention, the lamp shed its full light upon features of the most perfect outline—features o’er which the touching languor of melancholy had stamped an interest of indescribable expression. “ I would assure, yet know not how,” thought Theodore ; and still his eyes rested on the sylphid form of the prisoner.

“ Louisine—Louisine,” repeated the mysterious voice, “ behold, welcome the consolation I have promised—a friend

friend eager to lighten your sorrows—a friend eager to snatch you from the power of your persecutors.”

Vivid was the blush which mantled the downy cheek of Louisine—radiant the animation of her eyes. “A friend!” she murmured, drawing near the grate; and then she raised her clasped hands in grateful fervour.

“Yes, a friend, whose heart sympathizes in your woes,” eagerly exclaimed Theodore; “lady, a friend, who offers every effort to your service.”

“A friend!” again faltered Louisine; “a friend beneath this roof!—Holy Mary! how can I express a sense of my gratitude!—how can I——” and then she paused, for tears checked utterance.

“Midst a clan dead to pity—midst a clan of fierce marauders,” rejoined Theodore,

odore, "one heart exists, unvitiated, untainted; one heart, alive to all its native tenderness; one heart, anxious, devoted to the cause of humanity."

"A robber," articulated Louisine.

"No, no," proudly replied Theodore; "not a robber, lady, not a robber; though compelled to associate with robbers, death would be more welcome than dishonour."

"Pardon me, generous stranger," said Louisine; "pardon an unfortunate being, whom calamity has rendered suspicious."

"To circumstances, not suspicion, be doubt attributed," replied Theodore: "alas, lady! an acknowledged association with a lawless brigand, warrants, not only caution, but mistrust. Impelled by imperious destiny, a willing captive

am I bound ; for duty fetters chains inclination and principle would fain forego. Yet, if permitted to break this hateful restraint—if permitted to restore you to the world—to your family—perhaps parents, I shall no longer murmur at the perversity of fortune.”

“ Think you, generous unknown,” asked Louisine, “ that I would selfishly involve you in my calamities, or purchase liberty at an expence so great ? ”

“ Lady, you mistake,” rejoined Theodore ; “ my motives are not wholly disinterested ; I would reap the exquisite delight, the mental satisfaction, of having rescued innocence ; I would covet the pure thanksgiving which imagined benefits excite.”

“ Alas ! how short would be the period of enjoyment ! ” answered Louisine ;

“ the

“the hour of discovered liberty would seal the fate of my deliverer. Generous stranger! your life would fall beneath the murderous blows of fierce revenge; your life ——”

“No, no,” interrupted our hero; “lady, my life is guarded: Nature boasts a sway superior to revenge; Nature withholds the arm which rage uplifts. Displeasure’s threat my courage braves; and for my life, Montauban dares not harm it.”

The captive shuddered—doubtful was the glance of anguish she cast upon the speaker, as fearfully she articulated—
“Vermandois is more deadly.”

Theodore started, for he heard a piteous moan; and turning, traced the dark outline of the monk, stationed on the summit of the staircase. Again he sprung
towards—

towards it, but still it eluded his reach ; it darted as a shadow athwart his path, and vanished in the distant gloom. Theodore thought to pursue it, but darkness mocked the attempt. He knew not the intricacies of the tower ; and, besides, the newly-discovered prisoner claimed all his efforts. To rescue her from suffering, to restore her to liberty, was now the darling project of his enthusiastic mind ; to snatch her from the tyranny of his father ; to remove her far beyond the reach of her oppressors.

In this new pursuit, spurred on by the rectitude of his intentions, and the native generosity of his disposition, he would have braved every accumulation of danger ; he would have endured, without a murmur, the inflicted tortures of arrogated coercion. Sorrow had touched
the

the sensitive nerve of pity ; and the soft vibration thrilled every magic chord.

Alive but to this new impression of feeling, Theodore again approached the grate, and again whispered assurance to the forlorn one.—“ Believe, in silence, that you have a friend,” he said. “ Lady, when the eye of suspicion slumbers, I will repeat my visit. Inquire not for me ; and should days even intervene, conclude not, for one moment, that I relax in my design.”

“ Ah ! to a heart long dead to tenderness, how kind is this compassion !” answered Louisine. “ Even in the moment hope had forsaken me, Heaven gives me a friend—a friend to pity, to aid me.”

She paused ; her eyes were suffused in tears—tears which refreshed her long-oppressed spirits—tears, which, like the
genial

genial showers of summer, revived the fevered brain of despondence.

Theodore, alive to the infection of feeling, could have wept with her; could have echoed her sighs; could have yielded to the thrill of sensibility; but he struggled against the o'erwhelming weakness; for he dreaded lest his absence should be discovered—lest the indulgence of one moment should stamp an eternal bar to his designs. He suffered not a second glance to seduce his resolution; but, with a murmured prayer for success, fled from the tower, recovered his lamp, and hastened to his apartment.

CHAP. II.

'Tis God-like magnanimity to keep

—————Our reason calm and clear;

And execute her will, from a strong sense

Of what is right.

THOMSON.

.....

Why did I not pass away in secret, like the flower
on the rock, that lifts its fair head unseen, and strews
its withered leaves on the blast?"

OSSIAN.

It was on the third night succeeding the
discovery of the captive Louisine, that
Theodore, vainly racking the powers of
invention, successively formed and re-
jected a thousand expedients to obtain
the eagerly wished-for key of the prison.

In vain had he examined the exterior of
the tower. Admitting the moat fordable,
the casement was too high, and too
strongly grated, to warrant the slightest
hope of escape. In vain had he exa-
mined

mined the ponderous bars of detention ; the door scarce shook beneath his strength ; and from no other part of the tower could he trace any passage or communication. It was from stratagem alone, then, that success could be derived ; and stratagem was an expedient from which the upright mind of Theodore shrunk.

Ever had he shunned the wiles of deception ; ever, save when bound by the fatal oath of secrecy, had he acted as though the world's eye had scanned each movement. No cloud of mystery shadowed his actions, because no impulse of dishonour e'er tainted his mind ; example, instead of vitiating, had stamped more strong his native adoration of virtue ; for he had seen the blackening dye of guilt, and marked its dire incursions with dismay and horror. He had seen

night's sable reign destroy the boast of courage; because 'twas then the goading thorns of conscience admitted no palliative to blunt their sharpness.

Ah! how does error, numbing the faculties of discernment, steal into vice, rendering torpid the very principles of early initiation! Man, the slave of passion, oft hurried away by the effervescing gust, forgets, in the eagerness of pursuit, that the atoning hour of penance must—will arrive.

But to return to the point of deviation. It was on the third night, when Theodore, with a mind full of humanity and Louisine, watched each movement of Montauban, as leading his assembled followers, he prepared to quit the castle, that suddenly he saw him beckon Randolphe from the court-yard. The youth,
scarcely

scarce daring to breathe, followed with quick and noiseless step; and when he shrunk within the darkness of the passage, he paused, for he heard the cautious whispers of the bandit. He drew nearer; he listened; his heart pronounced the captive the subject of the conference.⁺

“Remember, Randolphe, the charge is weighty,” said Montauban. “Fears must not seduce your firmness. Secure well the prison; nor suffer human eye to mark your footsteps.”

“Trust me,” muttered the sullen Randolphe; and then he continued—“Vermandois would needs have her murdered, because——”

“Peace,” interrupted the bandit, for Theodore started with impulsive horror.

“Pshaw! ’twas but fancy,” resumed

Randolphe. "Time has been, my noble commander, when the sound of murder was not so appalling. Remember you the night when Vermandois' gold——"

"Curse him!" again interrupted Montauban.

"Curse him!" echoed Randolphe; "curse him! why, but for him——"

"You know my order," impatiently exclaimed the chief; "offer no violence to the prisoner: weary of bloodshed, I would fain save her life."

Theodore raised his clasped hands in gratitude, as his heart hailed this first intimation of mercy. Hope whispered—"Repentance may yet dawn—may yet snatch from perdition the guilty soul of my father."

"*Sated*, you mean," ironically observed Randolphe.

"'Tis

“ ’Tis no matter,” angrily rejoined Montauban; “ be submission your province.”

Theodore fled, for he heard them approach; he turned an angle to the left, nor quitted his hiding-place, till he heard the door reclosed which opened into the court-yard.

No sooner had the banditti quitted Vermandois, and the hollow clank of the chain denoted security in the elevation of the drawbridge, than Theodore, repairing to the common hall of assemblage, beheld Randolphe seated by the blazing hearth. Now was the moment to attain the pass to liberty; to snatch, perhaps from murder, the innocent victim of tyranny; and eyeing the huge key as it lay on the table, he drew a chair near the fire. “Are you sure,” he
c 3 demanded,

demanded, attentively marking the harsh features of the robber, "that we are alone in the castle?"

"Alone," sneeringly repeated Randolphe; "why, boy, did you not see the whole of the troop cross the draw-bridge?"

"I thought so," replied Theodore, his cheeks burning as though in reproof of this little effort at deception; "and yet as I crossed the south hall, a shadow darkened my passage, and a footstep sounded on my ear."

"Both eyes and ears have deceived you then," said Randolphe; "in truth, they are not to be trusted, when fear gets the start of reason."

"Fear reigns only with guilt," observed Theodore; "it never harbours in the light breast of innocence."

"Then

“Then am I innocent,” rejoined Randolphe, with a sarcastic laugh.

“Innocent !” echoed Theodore ; “ impious profanation !”

“Be wary,” sullenly replied the robber ; “ the man lives not who doubts my courage.”

“Your fierceness, your implacability,” boldly rejoined Theodore. “True courage cavils not with jealous recrimination ; it admits not of suspicion, because superior to dishonour.”

“True courage consists in bold deeds, and venturous undertakings,” muttered Randolphe.

“No, no,” said the youth with eagerness ; “true courage consists in greatness of soul ; in subjection of passion ; in heroic achievements ; in temperance, in forbearance : not in the maddening

zeal of merciless revenge; not in the damning crimes of sacrilege and murder. Oft does the world mistake the term; dazzled by the false glare of noisy triumph, oft does it stamp success and conquest with the name of hero! Rather would I be the wretch I am, beset with ills and exercised in care, than, for the empire of the globe, exchange with him who purchased thus his rule, the precious balm of soul-approving rectitude."

"Methinks you are an orator, if no hero," sneeringly remarked Randolphe.

Theodore turned in disdain; but his eye resting on the key, recalled to mind the suffering prisoner, and chased all thoughts but her deliverance. Forcing a conciliating smile, he asked how far the powers of Fancy could delude the eye and mock the reason?

"It

“ It depends on the brain which harbours her,” replied Randolphe.

“ A brain,” resumed Theodore, “ un-
tinctured with superstition, unswayed by
prejudice.”

“ Over a brain thus defended,” ex-
claimed the robber, “ Fancy boasts no
prerogative.”

“ Then ’twas a step my ears heard, a
form my eyes beheld,” said Theodore.

Randolphe mused for a moment, and
then replied—“ The wind will solve the
seeming mystery ; its murmurs explain
both sound and sight ; in one echoing
through the hall, and waving the ban-
ners.”

“ Ah ! but its echoes frame not words,”
pursued the youth ; “ neither could the
agitated shadow of the banners produce
a figure, guised in a cowl and scapular.”

Again the robber mused; then thoughtfully he remarked—"To one so accustomed to the monkish cowl and scapular, 'tis no wonder every imagined friar wears the habit."

"Then you are still incredulous," said Theodore, "and admit not the possibility of supernatural appearances. I remember hearing the brothers of Valombre relate a murder, discovered and avenged through the restless perturbation of an accusing spirit.—The last vesper-bell had chimed, and one dim lamp burned in the gloomy aisle of the church of St. Therese, when——"

"Stay," interrupted Randolphe, "I hate a dry story," springing from his chair, and seizing the lamp. "You are safe in the church of St. Therese: rest there until I beset the shrine of my worship."

"Whither

“Whither are you hastening?” demanded our hero.

“To the chapel, boy; I’ll quaff the muscadel, while you relate your braveries.”

“What! through the south hall, and down the corridor, and up the marble staircase, and—”

“Aye, though the monk leads the van, and the devil closes the rear,” interrupted Randolphe, laughing, “yet would I seek the flaggon.”

This was the moment Theodore pined for; he saw Randolphe leave the hall, and the key of the watch-tower still lay on the table; he grasped it—his hand trembled—his heart beat high—he sprung to the door—he listened; and when the footsteps of the robber ceased to sound, with an agile bound he fled from the hall

and down the passage. Quick as thought he crossed the court-yard, and the next instant found him in the watch-tower—found him at the door of the prison. He spoke not—he withdrew not one bolt—he did but apply the key—he did but turn the lock from its ward; and then, with almost breathless speed, retraced his footsteps. The hall was still vacant; he replaced the key on the table; he retook his station at the fire. The agitation at his heart died away, the labouring quickness of respiration ceased to threaten discovery, ere Randolphe, laden with the tempting flaggon, made his appearance.

“Come, sit you down, boy, and drink,” said the robber. “No monk jostled me in the passage, or strove to wrest the prize; though, by the mass! ’tis tempting,” pouring forth the sparkling nectar, “and
might

might stagger a saint's forbearance. Pshaw! break through old rules," for Theodore rejected the offered cup; "dost think monks have no private hoard?"

The youth replied not.

"Come," pursued Randolphe, "if you wont drink, you must talk: now for the promised story. I left you doing penance in the church of St. Therese. Come forth quickly, for the bare thought savours of purgatory."

"True, I was in the church of St. Therese," replied Theodore, forcing a faint smile, "and one lamp alone was burning in the aisle."

"I remember it," said Randolphe, again applying to the flaggon; "'twas on that very point you rested."

"Well,

“ Well, the last vesper-bell was chiming,” resumed Theodore, “ when suddenly a tall shadowy form glided up the centre aisle, and paused at the step of the confessional. It spoke not ; neither did it look to the right or the left ; but it waved its hand, as though beckoning one of the monks to follow. Again it paused, and again it looked round ; and as it raised its head, the hood of the cloak fell back, and revealed a face of spectre thinness. Fixed and rayless were the eyes, and every lengthened feature seemed marbled in the grave’s apathy. The monk paused involuntarily ;—again the figure beckoned ; but still he lingered. Ghastly was the expression of disapprobation, piteous the hollow moan of its regret. The monk advanced, and then the frown vanished ;
and

and then, with measured steps, still looking if he was followed, the figure retreated through the aisle."

"By the mass ! but the monk had courage," muttered Randolphe, yawning with drowsy attention ; and again he plied the flaggon ; and then again, with half-closed eyes, he listened to the narration.

"The figure paused beneath the only lamp which was burning," pursued Theodore, watchful to lull the slumbering faculties of the robber ; "and when again it traced indecision in the father, it threw back the cloak, and disclosed a wound deep and bleeding. Filled with wonder and commiseration, the monk numbered the beads of his rosary ; and then, inspired with fortitude and religious fervour, fearlessly advanced. The spectre continued to glide forward. A small
side

side door in the church opened at his approach, nor closed till the monk also had crossed the threshold. Sombre was the appearance in the heavens, and hollow moaned the blast, yet did the shadowy form of the stranger appear midst the dubious gloom. But you slumber," said Theodore, "and heed not my narrative."

"Yes, yes," replied Randolphe, half unclosing his eyes, "the ghost led him from the church—what then?"

"Why then," continued the disappointed Theodore, "they followed in silence a long winding path, which led into a solitude, so drear, that the father, though he had nothing to lose, trembled with fresh crowding apprehensions; and when the spectre pierced the verge of a forest, he again hesitated. The
spectre

spectre waved his hand, but the monk heeded not; the spectre groaned, but the monk attended not. He——”

The youth paused, for the deep breathing of Randolphe spoke him insensible to outer circumstances. He rose from his seat; he cautiously approached the door; but yet the robber moved not; his head had sank on the table, and he appeared buried in profound sleep.

Now was the moment to visit the captive Louisine; now was the moment to arrange some plan of escape. He hurried across the court-yard; he eagerly pierced the gloom of the watch-tower. Louisine received him with grateful joy, and listened to his assurances of protection with almost breathless attention.

“Once beyond these walls,” said Theodore, “I will conduct you to the convent of Bena Copia. There——”

“Ah!

“ Ah !” interrupted the timid Louisine, “ in our chance wandering, should we meet Montauban, or his followers ?”

Theodore mused in silence ; this was a possibility his mind had never formed. “ We must be cautious,” at length he observed, “ nor madly brave a danger so destructive Alas ! lady, by what untoward chance could fate have vested you in hands so lawless ?”

“ It was not chance, it was treachery,” sighed Louisine ; “ treachery which tore me from my peaceful home, then led me here to pine and die in bondage. The first early years of existence can boast no charm to interest attention ; passed in humble solitude, they were happy, because unmarked. My father,” and then she paused, for memory awakened the tear of filial tenderness,—“ my father,”
struggling

struggling with her feelings, “rented a small vineyard at the foot of the Alps, in Dauphine; and his affection and his tenderness stamped the first impression on my infant mind. I was his only hope; for me he struggled with the weight of woe that pressed upon his heart; some secret grief oppressed his spirits, and robbed him of his cheerfulness. Carefully he hid me from obtruding eyes, nor once permitted me alone to pass the limits of his little vineyard. ’Twas at St. Mary’s monastery I first imbibed the benefit of instruction; but even thither he tended my steps with ceaseless care; and from the lady abbess gained a promise to hide me from the busy eyes of strangers.”

“Could such precautions spring from mere affection?” questioned Theodore.

“Ah

“ Ah no !” said Louisine, “ ’twas the presaging fears of future evil.”

“ But, lady, did he ne’er explain the cause of this solicitude ?”

“ No, never. He told me once, that fortune had a brilliant scene eclipsed ; and that the hand of villany had blasted the early spring of greatness : but when I questioned him, he paused, and sighed, and bid me never ask what could alone occasion sorrow.”

“ Was he always thus reserved ?” demanded Theodore, entering with more than common interest into the narration.

“ Once, when he gave me this loved semblance of a sainted mother,” drawing a miniature from her bosom, “ he told me——”

Theodore started ; Theodore’s hand trembled ;

trembled ; it was the exact copy of the features which, in the stone gallery, had often rivetted his attention. As a miniature, it was confined ; but though no cherub, slumbering on her bosom, called forth the glowing interest of maternal love, yet nature stamped the smile of matchless sweetness, marking the calm of virtue, and the soul of honour.—“ Your mother !” he eagerly exclaimed. “ Mysterious Heaven ! within these walls, I’ve seen the portrait of the self-same countenance.”

Louisine clung to his arm ; her limbs trembled ; her cheek grew pale. “ Within these walls,” she articulated ; “ beneath this roof—sweet saints of mercy ! my mother beneath the roof of Verman-
dois !”

“ Yes, the same matchless, the same
expressive

expressive features," rejoined Theodore, "and the same seraph-smile; pleased with the contemplation, I have visited oft the portrait, nor ever left it, but with a regret which baffles all powers of explanation. You knew not, then, the tender breast which lulled your infant cares?"

"Alas, no!" said Louisine: "my mother lived not to impress the slightest trace of her remembrance. She was unfortunate; calamity shortened her existence; but in what shape I never yet could learn. My father, when to my care he gave this picture, bid me preserve it with unceasing caution; nor ere to boast of a possession which might my safety threaten. He told me, fate still veiled a tale of horror, which coming years might solve."

"Did he explain no further?" questioned

tioned Theodore; "did he throw no transient ray upon the seeming mystery?"

"No, not the most slender clue to aid my tortured fancy. He told me oft to cherish the blest semblance of an angel mother, whose rank, whose sufferings, and whose wrongs, merited a happier fortune. 'Twas in St. Mary's chapel, where public worship assembled the promiscuous throng, the duke de Vermandois first beheld me. Novelty produced a transient admiration. He heard my lot was humble, and from that moment marked me for his own. In vain he bribed me with the glare of splendour: I shrunk repugnant from his boasted power, and blighted his every hope of change. I will not waste my time, or your attention, in the never-slumbering schemes of vice; but quickly pass to when, with
terror,

terror, I first revealed his proffered love to my indulgent father. Ah ! never, never will the wild expression of his features be forgotten ; never the horror with which he heard me name Vermandois ; with which, in bitterness of heart, he cursed him, as one dead to mercy and to honour. Alas ! too fatal was the dire prediction of his wrath ! two nights from that, I saw my father sink beneath the strokes of Vermandois's hired bravoës ; and I, incapable of resistance, was quickly borne from the loved haunts of my infancy. Harrowing was the tumult of my ideas ; torn from my father, when fancy spoke him dying, and hurried beyond the reach of friendly interposition. In vain I pleaded for compassion ; cold, hard as the flinty rock, were the rough hearts of my unseemly guards ; they heeded

heeded not my tears, and smiled with brutal apathy at my entreaties.

“ It was late on the second evening, that exhausted, passive, I was borne from the carriage; and on recovering the transient suspension of intellect, I found myself on a downy couch, surrounded by every luxury which pampered affluence could invent. ’Twas then I learned the bitterness of my fate; ’twas then I learned, Vermandois’ power had severed me from the arms of Nature’s born protector. Ah ! deadly were the snares which art and villany practised; deep the plotted scheme for my undoing : but power and riches, threats and entreaties, alike proved ineffectual; and to rouse ambition’s slumbering charm, the rites of marriage were to be profaned : I was to be dragged re-

luctant to the altar, and wedded to a wretch my heart disclaimed.

“ The morning dawned, and misery seemed my destined portion ; no ray of hope illumined my blank prospects, or chased the gathering mists of my despair. Pale, horror-struck, dismayed, I tottered to the chapel, and heard, with sickening spirit, the whispered transports of Vermandois’ love. The priest began ; I heard the opening admonition, but heard no more ; strength, sense, and reason, fled ; the chapel quick receded ; and terror yielded to insensibility. Short was the lapse of power ; my eyes unclosed ; but ah ! how changed the scene ! My mother’s cherished image, torn from my neck, still trembled in Vermandois’ hand, whose every feature wore the stamp of
horror

horror and amazement—‘ Quick, name the original of this accursed picture ?’ he demanded, in loud appalling accents. But when my trembling lips pronounced, ‘ Mother,’ the picture dropped from his grasp ; breathless he clung to the arm of his servant ; and was supported from the chapel.

“ Scarce had I regained my prize, scarce had I hid it in my bosom, when, surrounded, I was hurried from the chapel, and conducted to my chamber. There in solitude whole days lingered, left to my own thoughts, and grateful for the interposing mercy which had snatched me from misery.

“ It was when night’s sable reign had eclipsed the brilliant orb of day, wrapping all nature in one general shadow, that again reflection was dissipated by the

D 2

rude

rude entrance of my former guards—my father's murderers. Overwhelmed by sudden horror, I shrunk not from their grasp; and when they seized me, no shriek of vain resistance passed my lips. They bore me from the apartment, and in silence conveyed me to a carriage. Yielding to my fate, no tear escaped my eye, no sigh my bosom; vain I knew were the efforts of entreaty, and unavailing all exertions to escape.

“The morning dawned, and brilliant was the scene her saffron rays disclosed. Wrapped, entranced, my wearied eyes wandered o'er creation's mingled outline, fixing with awful wonder on the giant heights of shapeless crags. Stupendous were the scenes through which we passed; but nature's mysterious hand roused not the slumbering apathy of my guards;

at

at least they heeded not her wildest flights; and heard the mountain-torrent, fretting in ceaseless roar, with blank indifference. Oh! to a mind tranced in the blissful calm of mild content, how sublime, how elevating, the study of Nature's laws, and Nature's architect! even I, with spirits wrapped in care, and mind absorbed, even I felt lost, when each turn, each opening pass, each narrow defile, oft disclosed the glowing scenes of rich luxuriant beauty. Quick was the transition, from valleys crowded with the smiling store of mellowed fruitage, to the drear steep of rocks and barren crags, scarce dotted with the verdant spring of vegetation; and then descending from the mountain heights, a gloomy pine-forest closed the scene; and this rude tower, all hopes of coming freedom."

Though Lousine had ceased to speak, still was her attentive auditor lost in thought—still buried in profound conjecture. In vain he sought to solve the change from love to hatred, to dive into the hidden motives of Vermandois' actions; each new thought knitted more close the mystic veil, and left him still the slave of wild surmise. “Has no relenting softness marked the return of frightened love?” demanded Theodore. “Say, lady, has Vermandois' actions ne'er betrayed the hope of dawning favour?”

“Hatred and dire revenge have quick succeeded all his former passion,” replied Louisine.—“Ne'er have my eyes beheld him, since when, with frenzied start, he dropped the picture; but to the lawless guard of ruffian bands has he consigned

signed me ; and doomed me yet to bleed beneath the murderer's steel."

"Avenging Heaven !" ejaculated Theodore, and then he started, for a confused murmur sounded from the court below. — " I must fly ! " he exclaimed ; " the troop are returned. Lady, should my visit be suspected, all power to save is lost."

Louisine trembled—her heart sank in dismay ; yet did she drive him from her. — " Quick, quick," she murmured ; " watch well the moment of deliverance ; be mine to pray for our success."

" When sleep has sealed the eyelids of the banditti," said Theodore, pausing at the door of the apartment, " I will return : be ready—be prepared ; I will guard you hence ; and though fatigue and danger tend the enterprize, yet will

we brave all threatened perils in freedom's cause, content to martyr life."

CHAP. III.

Fate *was* in *her* face, and from *her* haggard eyes
Look'd wildly out, and threaten'd ere *she* spake."

.....

DRYDEN.

Under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy,
Baited with reasons not unplaussible,
He hugg'd *them* in the snare.

MILTON.

THE timid heart of the lady Juliette shrunk as the abbess perused the mandate of the marquis. "We must lose you, my child," she said, vainly struggling to repress the tears of regret; "the power of a father is absolute, and the duty of a daughter is submission."

"Lose

“Lose me!” echoed Juliette, as her trembling hand received the letter—“Ah, holy mother! is the dreaded hour of separation named? am I indeed to be severed from the pious guides of my inexperience, from the dear friends of my affection?”

“You are recalled to the bosom of your family, to the society of your parents—of your brother,” said the superior, wishing, yet knowing not how to supersede, by a natural claim, the interest of the sisters of Bena Copia: “your mother pants to fold you to her heart; and your father——”

“To fulfil the compact of my marriage,” interrupted the shuddering girl.

“Ah, holy mother! my heart shrinks from the trial, and pictures nought but misery and woe. Would the marquis

but devote me to religion—would he but yield me a member of this community, my lips would breathe no murmur—my heart would feel no pang.”

“Far other scenes await you,” rejoined the lady abbess: “Juliette, be grateful for the lot awarded, and read the hand of Heaven over all. Within this cloister, what but patience and endurance could have marked the lagging hours? In bare content your life had slowly passed, unblessed—unblessing; but in the world, benevolence and virtue——”

“Mother, forbear; the world can boast no lure to reconcile the heart’s detested sacrifice. Ah! holy Heaven! what—what is the brilliant pageantry of greatness, when from the mind content is banished?”

“Through

“Through what fallacious sway—through what romantic medium,” demanded the superior, “has duty been dethroned? Juliette, unhappy child! tell me the fatal snare which has unbiassed your reason?”

“Nature,” replied Juliette, “and all the warring fears of strong repugnance; and gratitude, holy mother!” raising to her lips the passive hand of the abbess, “gratitude, so firmly vested here, that death alone can solve the obligation.”

The superior forced a smile, to check the gathering tear of fond affection; then, with an involuntary sigh, said—“Sacred be the claims of friendship! Midst the busy scenes of the world—midst the seductions of pleasure—midst the novelty of change, I could wish the sisters of Bona Copia to be remembered.

"To-morrow, my child, you leave our happy community; to-morrow, to the dictates of parental authority, do I resign my charge. This letter merely states the count de Montelioné to be your escort; and to a brother's love bids me consign you."

"To-morrow, holy mother! to-morrow!" sobbed the distressed Juliette; "must I to-morrow be banished from this peaceful roof, and all the dear, the cherished intercourse of friendship; must I fly almost to strangers?"

"Strangers!" repeated the alarmed superior; "a father—a mother—a brother—strangers!"

"Ah! tell me," said Juliette, burying her face on the bosom of her friend, "can Nature boast a claim stronger than gratitude? can relative ties alone ensure

the

the feelings, when interest and knowledge are wanting?"

The abbess could not answer.

"Alas!" pursued the weeping girl, "I know strict duty combats for her empire; but the heart, more stubborn, still pleads in defence, the mastery of feeling."

"Yet feelings uncontrouled are dangerous," mildly observed the lady abbess, "and often tend to sure destruction. Juliette, I tremble for your future peace: a sensibility so acute must either be the bane or blessing of existence: a heart like yours admits no medium, and spurns the proffered calm of negative content—it must live for others, not for itself. If then, unthinking child, the pale of duty limits not its wishes, where, in this life, can happiness be found?"

"Here—

“ Here—here, my mother,” fervently replied Juliette; “ nay, every where, when authority limits not its hopes, nor blights the dawn of coming pleasure.”

“ What pleasure can the mind portray unattended by a father’s blessing ?” questioned the superior.

Juliette shrunk in dismay, for she traced, in the speaking features of her friend, a cast of thoughtful care, and lowering disapprobation.

“ Trust me, inconsiderate girl, the mind that’s trained in virtue can ne’er, in the strict exercise of duty, be really wretched; neither can it hope for peace when disobedience colours all its fancies.”

“ Forgive me—forgive me, holy mother !” faltered Juliette; “ nor will I ere again class those unhappy, whose every
wish

wish is not fulfilled; I will remember ever the precepts you have taught me, and study to pursue the bright unclouded path of your example."

The abbess smiled; for where on earth exists the being dead to the reach of praise?—where beats the heart that's stoned against the entry of soft conciliation?—"My child," she said, "I could wish you to receive the count, your brother, with the smile of welcome; nor let o'erclouding sorrow mark your meeting: cheerfulness must veil the sigh of fond reluctance; nor must he once suspect that duty is your guide, not inclination."

Varied were the sensations of the sisterhood, as the news of Juliette's departure spread through the little circle; some, with selfish tears, deplored the
approaching

approaching loss of her society ; some faded cheeks flushed the warm glow of envy ; while others, alike dead to nature and to feeling, with cold and stagnant apathy, living but in the exercise of prayer, beheld, with blank indifference, all transitory changes.

Painful were the sensations of Juliette, as, for the last time, she joined in the evening's devotion—as her eyes, wandering o'er the chapel, rested, in melancholy anticipations, on the cherished companions of her infant years ; some bending with age ; others, with infirmity, alike hastening to the oblivious receptacle of nature ; and even those who now, strong in the enjoyment of health, fate might destine her to behold no more. Tears trembled in her eyes, and sobs checked her responses ; the solemnity

lemnity of worship touched her heart ; and the softened modulations of the sisters, now swelling with the organ's full peal, and now dying in melting chantings, soothed her spirits, and elevated them to a pitch of devout enthusiasm.

Each corner of the monastery did she visit, and each member of the holy community did she alternately embrace, ere she retired to her little chamber ; and when her pure mind sought the refreshing calm of slumber, still did the approaching separation sadden her spirits. Difficulties and dangers crowded on each other ; and the world, beyond the walls of Bena Copia, portrayed nothing but perplexity and disappointment.

The matin service closed, Juliette, struggling against her tears, fled into the garden, to court the freshness of the
balmy

balmy air; and as she rested under the spreading shade of mournful cypress, she saw the sister Laurette, in abstracted musing, moving slowly towards her. Juliette beheld her with more than usual interest; for though her features were fixed in seeming thought, still exercise had spread a hectic blush upon her cheek, which her black veil, partially shadowing, softened, without concealing. "Sister," said Juliette. The nun shrunk in terror—the blush vanished—and in its stead was stamped a gloomy malignity. "Pardon me," resumed Juliette, "I have disturbed your thoughts, and intruded on your meditations."

"Meditations!" repeated the nun, "you—you were the subject of those meditations."

"Me?" demanded the astonished girl.

"Your

“Your father dooms you to Vermandois’ bed,” exclaimed the sister. “Mark me, Juliette,” and fierce was the expression of her eye, “he will sting you to death—he will murder your soul—he will damn you, past the hope of future mercy.”

“My father!” faltered the shuddering Juliette.

“No, no, not your father,” resumed sister Laurette, “but Vermandois; he is the serpent that will coil around your heart—he is the serpent that will crush you in the sleeping hours of confidence.”

“No, never will he share my confidence,” replied Juliette; “fear not, sister, never——”

“Fly him,” interrupted the nun; “blast e’en parental hopes; nay, nay, court death, ere you believe and sink,

Vermandois

Vermandois is a murderer. 'Tis I arraign him—tell him, Ermissende—oh!" and frenzied was her shriek.

"Sister, what fear you?" questioned the trembling Juliette; "no danger threatens, nor no dreads destroy. Here, in the quiet calm of this retirement, where peace, and hope, and pure religion reigns——"

"They dragged me here—by force; they chained me down to penance," wildly interrupted the nun. "But no more. What can weak man avail, when stubborn will resists?"

"Alas! you waver," said Juliette; "some fancied ill disturbs your mind, and fills it ever with imagined terrors."

"Fancied," repeated Laurette, with a look that spoke the struggles of revenge and sorrow.

She

She paused ; her hand pressed upon her forehead ; her whole form trembled ; and o'er her cheek was spread the pallid hue of death. Juliette took the hand which hung listless by her side. " Sister," she implored, " if I have wounded—if I have awakened thought——"

" You," interrupted the nun ; " weak girl !" and contempt and pity varied the expression of her features ; " you wounded !—I would save you—no more—because you are young—because you are unsuspecting. I would lift the veil that shrouds your future destiny. Yield to the accursed dictates of ambition—become the passive instrument of policy—become the bride of Vermandois, and you are lost—Juliette, lost irremediably—eternally."

The nun passed her, and was hastening

tening towards the convent, when Juliette, rousing herself from the momentary abstraction of her ideas, sprung forward, and snatched her veil. "Stay, sister," she implored; "stay, and instruct my actions; you have pointed out the snare; teach me to escape it."

"Be firm—be absolute," said the nun; "and, though he threaten murder, shrink not from rectitude."

"Murder!" faltered the pallid lips of Juliette; "ah, sister! for what trials am I reserved?"

"None that can harm you, if your heart is firm," answered Laurette. "Even at the altar brave all angry threats; and tell your father, nay, the world, Vermandois is a murderer."

Juliette's trembling hand still grasped the veil; but though her lips quivered,

her

her eyes alone could ask a further solution; horror had checked all power—had frozen all energy of action. “Why, like a breathing statue, do I thus behold you?” questioned the nun; “guilt blisters not your lips; nor does the venom of fangs of conscience fester in your heart. Juliette, be resolute, and you are saved; submit to tyranny, and the foul fiend, Vermandois, will undo you.”

“Alas!” how can I combat ‘gainst authority and power?” interrogated the shuddering girl; “how can I escape, when fate conspires to crush me?”

The eyes of the nun were fixed upon her; fierceness and pride vanished, and sorrow and compassion softened every feature. “Juliette,” she replied, “to the adjurations of confession I have sealed my lips; nor e’er to giant power
would

would yield submission. I have dared both menace and entreaty; and heard my soul denounced, because my spirit would not humble: but to snatch you from deep, from ceaseless woe——”

She paused; she stood wrapped—lost in silent thought; then, with a frenzied start, quick snatched away her veil, and fled through the avenue.

Tortured with suspense, impelled by hydra fears, of giant, though of almost shapeless form, Juliette pursued her fleeting steps; but not till she had gained her little cell did she o’ertake her. “What would you seek?” demanded sister Laurette, as Juliette, panting, breathless, paused at the entrance; “why do you persecute—why torture me with questions I cannot solve?”

“Sister, my life, my peace, my quiet,
all—

all—*all depends upon you,*” faltered Juliette. “Teach me to substantiate the accusation, and snatch me from the fate I dread.”

The nun hesitated; then, in low and hurried accents, whispered—“Tell him you know Montauban’s pledge of fealty; quick, mark his features, and if they change not, tell him the murderer cannot rest in peace.”

“The murderer!” repeated Juliette; “sister, what murderer?”

“Vermandois knows the tale,” rejoined the nun. “Urge me no further. Tell him, *Ermissende*——” and then again she paused.

“Alas! how can I solve the ambiguous tendency of your expressions?” exclaimed the distressed Juliette.

The nun turned mournfully towards her—“Child, you must fly then,” she

rejoined, "if nothing else is left. Perjure your vows—deceive your father—steal, like a thief, from the parental dwelling—all, all is better than wedding this Vermandois."

"Fatal, dire necessity!" murmured Juliette. "Alas! where'er I turn, my eyes encounter nought but guilt and misery."

"If you wed him," observed the nun—"remember, if you wed Vermandois——" and then again she ceased; for a message from the lady abbess, announcing the arrival of the count de Montelioné, summoned Juliette to the parlour.

Sister Laurette sprung to the door of the cell.—" 'Tis I that bid you stay," she exclaimed. "Juliette, behold—view me; mark well the change that time and woe effects. Born to command, behold me on my knees—yes, I, the obdurate sinner,

ner,

ner, the profane, the sacrilegious wretch, who spurns the offered absolution, and perseveres in sin—I, whom Heaven, in man, condemn, I—I submit to pleading.”

“Alas! unhappy sister!” sobbed Juliette, vainly attempting to raise her.

“Think you I’m mad?” quickly demanded the nun—“Poor child, they have deceived you. Here no fever rages,” pointing to her forehead; “my thoughts are firm; my reason too collected; and memory so comprehensive, that years long past appear as yesterday. Promise me,” with frenzied fervor, for a step sounded in the passage, “promise me, Juliette,” her eyes darting fire, and every joint trembling, “to spurn—to blast Vermandois’ hopes; promise me to endure—to die, rather——”

The door flew open, and sister Lucille stood at the entrance.

“ I will follow you, sister,” said Juliette, motioning for her to depart.

The nun fled ; and the same energy of expression stamped the actions of Laurette—“ Juliette,” she continued, “ promise me to endure—to die, rather than yoke your fate to this murderer. Hell is not blacker than Vermandois’s heart. Oh!” with a long and shuddering sigh, “ I could a tale, so merciless, so dire, unfold. But it would blast us all,” hesitating ; “ the sinned against and sinning.”

“ I must go,” said Juliette, striving to withdraw her hand from the firm grasp of the nun.

“ Promise me first,” implored Laurette ; “ nay, nay, promise me, or I too will go, and urge your brother to redeem the victim I would save.”

“ You !” exclaimed Juliette.

“ Yes, I,” rejoined the sister. “ ’Tis true,

true, condemned to ceaseless penance, I dare not intrude within the gaze of strangers; but in a cause like this, who fears the idle threat of power? Juliette, you know me not; I have sworn to save you, and my oath shall be fulfilled. Promise me——”

“I do,” interrupted the impatient girl: “sister, I promise never to wed Vermandois, until this imputation of dishonour be refuted;” and shrinking from the no longer restraining arm of the nun, she hurried from the cell.

On reaching the parlour every self-created terror vanished. In the count de Montelioné, she beheld no stern observer of her actions; ah no! she beheld, she was clasped to the bosom of a brother, whose manners, whose looks, declared conciliation and tender interest. Jealousy stamped not his features, when tears

of affection and regret recorded the moment of separation. He saw Juliette sob on the bosom of the lady abbess, yet he breathed no reproach, he whispered no reflection; he, too, felt grateful for the almost maternal interest of the superior; he, too, enumerated with fervency the blessing of such an instructor, of such a friend.

Youth, the season of cheerfulness, the nurse of hope and gay anticipations, revelling in bliss unseen, and spurning every vestige of sober care—youth, aided by Fancy's sanguine pencil, soon dried the tear of fond regret; and, strengthened by novelty's unerring charm, roused e'en the mind of the lady Juliette from the sombre contemplation of Bena Copia's cloister. Each new unfolding scene seized the wrapped gaze of pleasure, and claimed the eager flights of novel rapture.

ture. Reserve and apprehension vanished ; Juliette started a thousand subjects ; and ever and anon, as eagerly she gazed from the windows of the carriage, she awakened a smile at the simplicity of her remarks.

The day wore away, and the evening fast was closing, and yet Juliette felt insensible to terror : she had heard the nuns recount the enormities of banditti ; but when she gazed upon the retinue whom pride, she judged, had armed to tend the carriage, she felt the inspiring glow of firm defence. Steep and difficult was the descent from the mountains. The road, often darkened by o'erhanging crags, often winding on the slippery edges of perpendicular precipices, required all the guard of caution and deliberation ; sometimes towering o'er rude, o'er almost air-hanging bridges,

then again shelving midst the gloomy umbrage of oaks and mulberries. No vestige of human habitation could be traced ; and as night, with hasty strides, advanced, the prospect, if possible, became more wild and more drear. Vegetation no longer glowed in fragrant beauty, but giant rocks, and barren pathless steeps, crowding on each other, furnished one mass of black fantastic range. Slowly they proceeded ; but when the carriage reached the delving base of the mountain, night's gloomy mantle wrapped e'en earth and heaven in one unvaried blank. The road could scarcely be distinguished ; and the black outskirts of a pine forest, spreading far and wide, offered no charm to tempt their progress. The servants paused in moody doubt ; and to the eager questions of the count, acknowledged they had missed the beaten track,

track, and knew not how to steer. To proceed was madness, strangers, as they were, to the rude haunts of these deserted wilds, whose obtruding steeps, and yawning precipices, in the dark, threatened the safety of an experienced guide; and to remain, closed in such a train of perils, that Montelioné, trembling for his sister, hesitated how to decide. As he gazed from the window, the distant report of an harquebuss filled him with new apprehensions. He knew the Pyrenees to be infested with banditti, and the momentary expectation of an attack roused every exertion of courage.

Whispering assurances to the now-terrified Juliette, he sprung from the carriage; and as he grasped his fire-arms, he saw a human figure shrink into the obscurity of the forest. He called, but no answer was returned; and fear-

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lessly

lessly darting forward, he again caught a glimpse of the same figure.—“Stranger,” he called out, “fear not; we are travellers like yourself, and would but inquire the road to Tarascon?”

“I am no guide,” surlily said the man.

“Pardon me,” said Montelioné, “’tis a director, not a guide, we require.”

The stranger hesitated; and having attentively eyed the count, answered, “’Tis many leagues to Tarascon, and the night too dark, and the passes to the direct road too intricate, to warrant the enterprise—stay till morning.”

“What, in the open air?” said Juliette, for the stranger had followed the count to the side of the carriage.

“Why, lady, what is there to fear?” demanded the man.

“I know not,” she articulated; and then remembering the harquebuss she had

had heard, tremulously concluded—
“The attacks of banditti.”

“Many and oft times have I trodden these wilds,” resumed the stranger, “but never have I met with interruption or annoyance. Your retinue is so numerous,” hesitating, “else my habitation—”

“I care not for myself,” said Montelioné, with eagerness; “accommodate my sister till morning, and every recompence——”

“Nay,” interrupted the man, “I can accommodate more than the lady. You will find it but a rude haunt; for what suits a hardy hunter accords not with the luxuries of grandeur.”

“It will be a shelter,” exclaimed Juliette, as, aided by her brother, she alighted; and supported by his arm, and attended by two of the servants, the rest

remaining with the carriage, with incautious confidence following their guide, they struck into the forest.

“Do you live alone?” inquired the count, as he moved by the side of the stranger.

“Ours is but a temporary residence,” replied the man: “as birds of passage, we assemble here to enjoy the sports of the chase; and frequently find night o’ertake us at a distance from our rendezvous.”

“’Tis a perilous life,” observed Juliette.

“True, lady, but ’tis suited to our taste,” replied the stranger, pausing under a black and time-worn watch-tower; and then pointing to the uplifted draw-bridge, he continued with a laugh—“My companions are housed before me. I

left

left them on the very summit of yon range of rocks; but agile as the doe, neither distance or obstructions daunt us. Ours is a happy life, monsieur;" and raising a small horn which hung by his side, and blowing a shrill blast, the drawbridge, as though by magic, was instantly lowered. Still unsuspecting, the count de Montelioné and his little party crossed into the court-yard, and then again the drawbridge was upraised, and preceded by their guide, they advanced.

The count grasped the hilt of his sword, as he paused at the entrance of a dark passage, for he felt the trembling Juliette cling tighter to his arm; and as suspicion, like an electric flash, darted on his mind, he loudly demanded whither they were going?

"Stay, monsieur," replied the man;

"I had

“I had forgotten you were a stranger to these intricate windings; stay where you are until I fetch a light.”

In a few moments he returned bearing a lamp; and, for the first time, the count beheld his features. He started, not in terror but in conviction, for fierceness marked each lineament, and deep design scowled beneath the bushy shadow of his knit eyebrows. To retreat was now too late; with unthinking temerity he had fallen into the snare; and to veil every appearance of suspicion, seemed his only alternative. Whispering an assurance he could not feel, he strove to revive the drooping spirits of Juliette; and following the supposed hunter, entered a square chamber lighted by a wood fire. Montelioné, seated as a guard by his sister, watched the door; but still no strangers entered.

entered. At every passing sound, his hand was laid upon his sword ; but his host appeared not to notice his suspicions. Suddenly quitting the apartment, the count instilled the same fears into his domestics, who, faithful to their charge, promised to forfeit life in their defence. Juliette uttered a half shriek when the stranger, followed by four others of similar appearance to himself, re-entered the chamber ; nor did her tremulous fears subside, at the loud laugh, which marked their notice of her terrors. The count offered a hasty apology for Juliette's incaution, and then forced himself to converse, with an indifference he could not feel. The rude exercise of the chase was again discussed, and, ever and anon, Montelioné marked the significant smile, or the half-nod, which spoke

the

the understood allusion. Juliette, in thoughtful silence, sat trembling by his side, now shrinking from the piercing glance of admiration, and now blushing at the ribaldry of loose unlicenced wit ; while the domestics, in narrow observation, awaited but one hostile movement, to draw their tempered swords.

“ Why, Leonard,” said one of the men, “ with stomachs sharpened by the mountain blast, dost mean to treat your guests with simple fire and shelter ? ”

“ We hunters are uncourtly,” said Leonard, rising from his chair, “ but freedom and welcome be our motto.”

In a few moments the board was spread with viands of tempting savour, of which Juliette could not, but Montelioné forced himself to partake ; nay, he rallied his spirits, and joined, with seeming ease, in the
convivial

convivial laugh of cheerfulness; but when the sparkling flask was circulated, he decisively rejected the luscious nectar, fearful lest some deep scheme should lurk beneath the mask of seeming hospitality. Temperance, the common jest of fools, opened a field for ridicule; but the count, still acting under the guidance of caution, parried each light attack, without betraying his motive. The hours advanced; yet still the bacchanalian rites continued; still flask succeeded flask, till rash intemperance, and discordant riot, governed each movement.

Suddenly the deep shrill echo of a horn changed mirth to action; each from his station started; and each, as though by magic impulse, rushed from the apartment.

Montelioné likewise rose, and drew
his

his polished blade : he strove to rouse his fainting sister ; and as he fondly clasped her, he heard the loud invectives of approaching numbers—" Be resolute," he whispered ; and then, attended by his servants, rushed into the passage.

Juliette, whose ebbing strength the frenzied start of desperation quick restored, with piercing shrieks called on her brother. She too fled the chamber ; but when she reached the passage, no ray illumined, nor no hope inspired. She paused—she listened—she heard the clash of swords ; and then the hollow groans of tortured nature. Loudly she shrieked, for Montelioné's murdered form was all her fancy pictured ; she breathed his name ; and then, with eager speed she fled, for footsteps quick pursued. Though darkness veiled each ob-
ject,

ject, caution nor fear restrained her ; with maddened energy she braved each peril, nor paused till speed to nature yielded : then was the rest but momentary, for the footsteps sounded nearer. They gained upon her ; they roused each dormant faculty ; they filled her with horror—with despair. Again she fled ; her passage was obstructed ; she turned a narrow angle, then sank upon the earth.

CHAP. IV.

Were my whole life to come one heap of troubles,
The pleasure of this moment would suffice,
And sweeten all my griefs with its remembrance.

LEE.

SHORT was the lapse of suspended animation ; Juliette revived : the horror of
her

her situation returned ; she rose from the earth ; she listened : the loud clamour of contention, the blasphemous execration of impiety, the threats of revenge ; the groans of anguish, the clashing of swords, had died away, and deep was the calm which had succeeded. Dismayed, she clung to the damp cold wall ; she gazed around, but darkness precluded the distinguishing of objects : no ray lighted the gloom, or pointed out the road to freedom. The heart's blood of the hapless Juliette turned to ice ; convulsive struggles agitated her frame ; she shrunk further into the gloom, and again sank panting on the earth. Instantly terror recalled exertion ; instantly despair rallied strength ; an involuntary shriek escaped her, for her hand rested on a human face. Horror palsied every
faculty ;

faculty ; she rushed from the object of dismay, then stopped irresolute, doubtful whither the next step might precipitate her. Lingered were the ensuing hours of suspense, agonizing the blank of incertitude ; nor till tears lightened the swollen anguish of her bosom, did almost maddened apprehension yield to the influence of reason ; then she sank upon her knees ; then, in the spirit of true piety, her soul was elevated in prayer. The torpor of despair had subsided ; her hand grasped the precious ensignia of her faith : the devout precepts of the instructress of her youth changed the murmur of complaint into resignation ; and the approaching moment, though teeming with fate, awakened not the pusillanimity of fear. “ Better to die,” she exclaimed, “ than to live the victim of lawless plunder ;

plunder; better to die in innocence, than to live in dishonour! yes," in the glowing ardour of true heroism, "the daughter of the marquis de Lurenville dares the pangs of death in defence of virtue."

Such were the reflections, such the determinations of the wretched Juliette, when footsteps once more approached. Breathless she listened; one moment fancy picturing the brigands of plunder; the next, turning the scale of fate in favour of her brother, his tender arms seemed to enfold her, and the warm kiss of fraternal love to glow upon her cheek. "Grant it, Heaven!" she aspirated, as the invigorating rays of a lamp darted through the gloom. She no longer attempted flight; but admitting the possibility, panted to hail the well-known features

features of a friend. Her eager eyes watched the intruder ; alas ! they sank in dismay, for a stranger stood before her.

“ Fear not, lady,” he said, in accents which banished terror. She looked up : the form, the countenance, the manners of the stranger, impressed confidence, ensured respect. Gratefully she extended her hand ; the youth sprang forward ; he started—an exclamation of surprise escaped : he dropped his sword—he snatched the proffered boon to his lips. “ I will open the pass to liberty,” he said ; “ I will save this peerless innocent, or relinquish life. Lady, arise ; be resolute—be determined ; the arm shrinks not in your defence, but the enterprise in perilous.”

Juliette shuddered ; she cast a timid glance on her unknown defender : the
stamp

stamp of manly beauty glowed upon his cheek ; the benignity of honour sparkled in his eyes. She feared not to trust him ; but the words he had uttered froze the warm ardour of her hopes. The struggles of gratitude conquered the woman's weakness, and softly she expressed her fears, lest his generous interposition should involve his safety.

“ My safety,” he repeated, with a mournful smile ; “ already my safety is ensured.”

“ Then we fly together,” eagerly rejoined Juliette.

“ Alas ! no, lady ; though honour points to freedom, duty binds me here. When you are in safety, I return to my post. The soul's enfranchisement demands exertion.”

Doubt and curiosity marked the expressive

pressive features of Juliette: the dark eyes of the stranger sank beneath her scrutiny.

“ I saw you once,” he exclaimed, “ once, and for ever. Lady, white as vestal purity, I saw you in the chapel of the convent of Bena Copia: yes, at the profession of the nun Monique, I saw you strew with roses the step of the altar. I saw you next at the grate, protecting, encouraging, supporting. Age had furrowed the cheeks of your companion; but though Hygeia’s smile dimpled in your own, yet did you sooth—yet did you uphold her! and now, even in this den of horror, I see you anxious for a stranger’s safety—Juliette! lady! adored object of my daily worship! I see you unrivalled in virtue as in beauty—I see you pre-eminent in all your sex’s charms

—I see you superior to all your sex's weakness."

Juliette, amazed, shrunk from the eager gaze of the stranger; but as she averted her face in blushing diffidence, her eyes encountered the ghastly object of her former terrors. The flame of the lamp dimly glared o'er the stiffened features of one of the banditti, from whose still gaping wounds slowly ouzed the stream of life.

The stranger marked the shuddering horror of her countenance. "Suffer me to lead you hence," he said, hurrying towards the door. "Rapine and murder are inimical to such gentleness—alas!" and an air of disquietude pervaded his features, "in this habitation 'tis no novel sight."

"In this habitation," repeated Juliette;

liette; "have you long sojourned in this habitation? Ah! I see it is not the grave of humanity."

"Alas!" observed Theodore, for it was indeed Theodore, whose arms supported the worshipped form of Juliette, "let us fly this scene of horror. Lady, fear not; I boast some influence; I boast some power. Yes," with an energy all his own, "I have lived to bless the moment of my——"

He paused, for Juliette, clinging to his arm, and tottering towards the door, whispered, "My brother," and tears flowed at the remembrance.

"The count de Montelioné is safe," said Theodore.

Juliette started; she gazed steadfastly in the face of her protector; she saw his cheek flush crimson; she felt the

tremulous emotion of his whole frame. —“ Safe,” she repeated, “ why then this agitation ?”

Theodore was silent ; he dared not trust himself to speak, lest, beguiled by love, in a moment so inauspicious, he should divulge the secret of long—of cherished passion.

“ Stranger,” continued the unconscious girl, “ hide not the fatal confirmation. Montelioné——”

“ Lives,” interrupted Theodore—“ lives to guard, to protect his sister. Lady, one effort more, and freedom will be yours. Fear not ; proceed in silence, and the approaching moment closes on your deliverance.”

Juliette spoke not ; she grasped his hand ; she raised it in grateful fervor to her lips. Rapturous was the smile which

which marked the features of our hero—dangerous the transports which pervaded his heart ; and yet no word escaped, no simple acknowledgment of devoted enthralment. He had lived to rescue her from danger, and though the next instant stamped the fiat of separation, yet did not honour once shrink from its fulfilment. He felt the shuddering Juliette cling tighter to his arm, as loud peals of laughter bespoke the carousals of the banditti ; but whispering courage, he led her forward, nor paused till they reached the low postern opening into the court-yard. Again he whispered silence, and again he grasped the cold hand of his charge.

“ My brother,” articulated the doubting girl.

“ Fear not, lady,” rejoined our hero ;

“ I pledge my life for his safety. Once without the castle——” and then he paused, for, as he softly opened the gate, the impatient Montelioné, pressing forward, clasped Juliette to his bosom.—“ Ah, generous—generous stranger !” he exclaimed ; but Theodore, commanding caution, led across the court-yard. He withdrew the bars of the outer portal ; it yielded to his strength ; it flew open : instantly he lowered the drawbridge, and followed by the servants, in safety they crossed the moat. As Theodore paused upon its brink, as he turned his eyes upon the watch-tower, memory recalled one other prisoner he had sworn to rescue—Louisine, the suffering victim of coercion—Louisine, now sighing in her turret-chamber. The thought and the execution were one. “ Lady,” he said, checking

checking the eager exclamations of gratitude, "'tis for me to become the debtor—stay yet a moment," and then he fled, then he recrossed the drawbridge, and ascending the stairs of the watch-tower, returned ere conjecture had time for play, returned with Louisine. He led her forward. "Count," he exclaimed, "to your protection, and the lady Juliette's friendship, I commit a charge doubly sacred; a charge, by treachery severed from a father's arms; then, by revenge and persecution, long retained in dire captivity."

"A second sister," said Montelioné, taking the hand of Louisine, "whose peace, whose happiness, and whose safety be henceforth sacred as the first."

Tears registered the bond of union;

for Juliette, in all the ardour of her feelings, confirmed the promised tie ; and murmured " Sister," as affectionately she pressed her lips to the soft cheek of Louisine.

Theodore, their guide, their friend, their deliverer, and whose exertions alone had saved their retinue from the rapacity of plunder, anxious for their safety, yet dreading the approaching moment of separation, led, by an unfrequented path, through the forest ; and then striking into a narrow defile, quickly emerged on a level plain, at the extremity of which the carriage was stationed.

Night had yielded to the grey dawn of morning, and the east newly glowed with the softened saffron of coming day ; but still her murky dews spread in thick vapours

pours o'er creation's bosom, impregnating each spiral blade and downy blossom.

Grateful for the dangers they had escaped, Juliette and Louisine, scarce crediting the blessed assurance of liberty, shrunk not from lesser perils, but, with persevering exertion, crossed the plain, and reached the destined spot of separation. Then, and not till then, did sorrow claim the sway of feeling; for then, with unavailing argument, did they strive to change our hero's determined resolution to return. "Alas!" questioned Juliette, and she pressed his hand with a fervor which gratitude and regret sanctioned, "what circumstance, in nature, can warrant a sojournment with a band so lawless?"

Theodore started—Theodore gazed
F 5
upon

upon her, his heart tortured by the struggling sensations of shame and anguish. "God of mercy!" he ejaculated, and then he struck his hand upon his forehead, as despairingly he rejoined, "There is a circumstance—a tie—imperious—unquestionable."

He paused, for Juliette, in almost breathless eagerness, exclaimed, "Not—not inclination?"

"No, no," replied Theodore, in all the native dignity of his character, "not inclination. Lady! angel! Juliette! you, even you, may cherish me in pity—may remember me without shame. I am no robber, though compelled to associate with robbers; I am——"

Convulsive sobs checked the powers of articulation; he snatched to his lips the passive hand of Juliette, and then
would

would have rushed from her, had not the arm of the count restrained him.—“ We part not thus,” said the astonished Montelioné. “ Stay yet a moment, my generous deliverer ! my noble, my disinterested friend ! stay and tell me by what services, by what actions, I can express a gratitude my heart must ever feel ?”

Theodore hesitated—his eyes rested on a small ebony cross suspended from the neck of Juliette. That cross—that precious relic, from the bosom of his saint, was the recompence he coveted, and yet he dared not ask it. Juliette’s eyes, as though by sympathy, rested on the same object ; her hand intuitively grasped it—she raised it to her lips : instantly it became enriched ; instantly it became a thousand times more valuable,

than though studded with the most costly gems.

Yielding to his feelings he sprung forward ; he bent his knee before her.—“Be that little cross my recompence,” he murmured ; “be it the future emblem of my worship. In the den of vice it shall be enthroned in my bosom—it shall be cherished—it shall be sacred, as though within the pale of cloisteral sanctity. Lady,” and his eyes, in all the softness of entreaty, in all the expression of tender interest, rested on the glowing features of Juliette, “in the monastery of Valombre I have learned to estimate the gift.”

Registered, eternally registered, became the grateful acknowledgments of Theodore, as Juliette, blushing with novel but delightful emotion, threw the
little

little cross around his neck. She saw him bury it in his bosom—she saw his eyes emit the thanks his lips refused to utter—she saw him pause in doubtful irresolution ; then, with a look mocking the pencil's powers of delineation—with a sigh swollen by the double tide of passion and of sorrow, she heard him breathe —“ *Remember me,*” then fly across the plain, and disappear within the defile.

CHAP. V.

Oh! while you speak, methinks a sudden calm,
In spite of all the horrors that surround me,
Falls upon ev'ry frighted faculty,
And puts my soul in tune.

LEE.

THOUGH under the head of romance, the
vivid flights of fancy claim, and are ad-
mitted

mitted the *ad libitum* of uncurbed space ; though many precedents sanction the wild sports of imagination, leaving connection, nay, almost solution, to the exertions of their good-natured readers, yet the author of the *Confessioal of Valombre*, not seeking assistance from the necromantic arts of enchantment, or the incantations of witchery, thinks it necessary to account in few words for the almost magic influence of her hero, and his seasonable appearance, at the instant hope had nearly closed on the prospect of the lady Juliette.

Theodore, warned by the sounds he had heard in the court-yard, to quit the prison of Louisine, cautiously descended the spiral staircase ; and as he paused beneath the shadow of the archway, hid from observation, yet himself noticing what passed,

passed, he saw Randolphe, whom he had left sleeping o'er the half-finished story, in deep commune with the bandit. Trembling for the fate of the fair captive, in whose safety he felt more than common interest, he watched each action, and listened to each passing sentence.

“The booty must be all our own,” said Randolphe, pausing at the very entrance of the watch-tower.

Theodore shrunk further into the gloom, fearing almost to breathe, lest he should betray himself.

“Leonard, under a promise of shelter, has enticed some travellers hither,” continued the robber: “they were too strong, when together, to warrant an attack on the plain.”

“What, now within the castle?” questioned Montauban.

“Aye,

“Aye, as fair a lady as the day e’er dawned upon,” answered Randolphe; “and her brother as handsome a chevalier as e’er grasped a sword. We shall have sharp work, I warrant me. ’Tisn’t one arm will do his business: but they must be silenced, or——”

“’Twas impolitic,” interrupted the chief, musing—“Our haunts once suspected——”

“Who is to suspect?” exclaimed Randolphe.—“Do you seize the booty abroad; leave it to us to silence complaints at home.”

And then he described the exact spot where the carriage was stationed, and cautioned Montauban to take his choicest spirits, suspecting the blows would be hard.

Theodore no sooner saw the courtyard

yard clear of observers, than his comprehensive mind formed the design of rescuing the devoted travellers, and depriving the banditti of their promised plunder. He fled unnoticed from the castle, nor returned until he had not only warned the attendants of the count de Montelioné of the threatened danger, but removed the carriage from the intended place of attack, and stationed it in a plain, bordering the main road, from which they had so recently and so unfortunately deviated. On regaining Vermandois, his spirits elevated, and his heart panting in the anticipated success of his philanthropic design, dead to every caution of self-security, and living but to blot the blackening die of perpetration from the already swollen catalogue of his father's enormities, Theodore

odore watched each movement of the party, and saw them quit the castle without once being suspected as a spy; then, carefully avoiding the five remaining bravoës, he lingered in an adjoining apartment, anxiously awaiting the moment to warn the travellers of their danger. But the intemperate excess of the robbers wore away the absence of Montauban, nor, till the horn sounded, did they leave their devoted victims to his interference; then the invectives of disappointment, and the angry retorts of Leonard, roused the alarmed Montelioné and his servants, to save the lady Juliette by guarding the door of the apartment; and then Theodore, rushing from his covert, grasped the uplifted arm of the count, exclaiming, "Proceed, and you are murdered; trust to my guidance, and I will save you."

"You!"

“ You !” repeated the amazed, the half-doubtful Montelioné.

“ This is no time for explanation,” eagerly replied Theodore; “ hesitate, and the power to save will be lost.”

As he spoke, with Herculean strength he grasped the sword-arm of the count, and impelled him through an opened door on the opposite side of the passage. —“ My sister !” exclaimed Montelioné, struggling for freedom.

Theodore slammed to the door to restrain him, then dropping on his knees, and raising his clasped hands—“ Count,” he exclaimed, “ by the God who sees us, who created us, and who now reads the rectitude of my intentions, by that God I swear to save, to restore your sister in safety, or perish in the cause !”

To doubt was an offence almost against
Heaven :

Heaven: the piety, the fervor, the expression, the countenance of our hero, banished hesitation, and the impulse and the execution became alike electric.

The vaults of the castle were to be the covert of concealment. The servants had descended through a trap-door, which the foresight of Theodore had already opened; and as Montelioné paused upon the brink, as his tortured feelings again pronounced "*Sister*," "I pledge more than my life," whispered Theodore, placing his spread hand upon his heart, "I pledge my honour."

The count had no sooner descended, and the trap-door closed in security, than Theodore, eager to conduct his newly-accepted charge to the same shelter, fled to the opposite chamber—it was vacant—it was deserted. Alarmed, he

he returned to the passage : he paused irresolute, for he still heard the banditti in loud and angry dispute ; nay, it was not confined to words, for he heard the clash of swords, and, in the pauses, the mournful groans of the wounded. He shuddered, for they were men—they were fellow-creatures—one was *his father* : the thought called for interference ; the thought impelled him forward, impelled him to the scene of action. Horror and confusion reigned—Leonard and three of his associates were bleeding in the passage, for even Montauban had in vain exerted the power of command. It was long ere order was restored, for the angry broil had effaced even the remembrance of the travellers. Leonard was too faint from loss of blood, to speak of the past ; and the other four who had remained with him

him at the castle too lost, from the fumes of intemperance, to minute particular occurrences. Time wore away in the necessary exertions of Theodore to mollify the bitter invectives which reproach and retort excited; and not till the wounded men were properly attended, and unanimity restored o'er the care-drowning flask, could Theodore act or think of the travellers. Then, unperceived, he stole from the bacchanalian orgies of the robbers; and having liberated the count and his servants, and directed them to the court-yard, hastened to seek the being he had so solemnly sworn to save. Ah! how little did his heart picture Juliette as he traversed the passage!—how little did imagination anticipate the sensations of the approaching moment! To behold, in darkness, in suspense, in danger, in sorrow,

the

the woman he had so long, and so unceasingly adored—Juliette, the bright ectype of excelling perfection—the pure vestal of his secret homage—to snatch her from ruin—from misery—from death—to be enthroned in her memory—to be cherished with gratitude, perhaps with esteem. What a tide of emotion rushed to his heart ! what a glow of exultation brightened on his cheek ! yes, he had lived to bless the influence of Montauban ; he had lived to date with joy his removal from Valombre.

To be hailed her deliverer—to feel the dangerous pressure of her hand, as softly she murmured gratitude—to gaze upon her lovely features—to trace each varying tint of their expression—and yet in one moment—in one fleeting moment, to tear himself from the seduction—to
be

be separated, perhaps for ever—Theodore was human nature; and Theodore thought of the deprivation, with a pang almost death-fraught. Yet did he resist the incitements to escape; with almost stoic firmness, did he combat the united entreaties of Montelioné and his sister. 'Tis true, he was the slave of love; but 'tis also true, that rectitude conquered passion; nay, had death awaited his return to Vermandois, boldly would he have braved its pangs, rather than have forfeited his word—rather than have falsified his promise, of never seeking, by escape, to renounce the influence of his father.

Ashamed of his weakness, anxious, yet unable, to controul the o'erwhelming tide of feeling, he dared no longer tarry in the plain—he dared no longer
stem

stem the soul-moving expressions of grateful friendship. Safety lay in flight; to remain, was to betray an interest, which neither compassion, or common regard, could ere awaken; an interest, which Nature stamped indelible—which love pronounced eternal.

Rich in the possession of the little cross, which so late had heaved on the snow-white bosom of Juliette, he rushed from the plain; nor paused, till the o'erhanging shadow of the defile entirely excluded the carriage from view; then, severed, as it were, from the ties of softened fascination, unseen, unheard, he yielded to his tears, and breathed the bitter sighs of regret and despondence.

Suddenly starting—suddenly remembering the claim which nature held upon his obedience; the hopes which once

he formed, and which e'en now he cherished, of seeing the crest of guilt humbled—fallen—superseded by the meekness of repentance—of leading his father to *the Confessional of Valombre*, and claiming a blissful interest in his conversion, roused every dormant principle of exertion, and whispered perseverance could alone ensure attainment.

The thought, the presentiment, appeared prophetic—appeared a prelude of coming good. Theodore, with a smile of self-assurance, again hid his newly-attained treasure in his bosom; and then, his heart impressed with Juliette—his soul devoted to the sublimest flights of virtue, returned to the castle.

CHAP. VI.

———All my hopes, my soul, is thine;
 You take up ev'ry portion of my heart;
 And here, to death, I swear the everlasting truth.

SHIRLEY.

.....

What means this boding terror, that usurps,
 In spite o' me, dominion o'er my heart,
 Converting the sweet flow'r of new-blown hope
 To deadly night-shade? pois'ning to my soul
 The fountain of its bliss.

MILLER.

To minute the journey of the count de Montelioné, his sister, and their lovely charge, would swell with descriptive detail, without unfolding the interest of my story; be it sufficient then to explain, that the travellers reached Lurenville Abbey without any further incident, and were received with the warmest expressions of affection.

The marchioness piously crossed her
 G 2 bosom,

bosom, as she listened to her son's recital of their escape from the banditti; and the marquis joined in the panegyrics which ever attended the name of their deliverer. "I would give the world," said Juliette, and a half sigh swelled her bosom, "to know the motive which impels his continuance with the robbers."

"It is enigmatical," observed Montelioné; "for honour appears to sway his every thought."

"Honour does sway every action," eagerly rejoined Juliette; "for Nature stamps not with a corrupt heart the lineaments of truth:" and then she paused and blushed, for the eyes of her father were directed towards her.

"Methinks you are warm in the praises of this stranger," remarked the marquis.

"Gratitude,"

“Gratitude,” said Montelioné, pitying the evident confusion of his sister, “warrants the warmth of encomium.”

The marquis smiled ironically.—“Yes, gratitude,” ardently repeated Juliette; “for to this stranger are we indebted for life.”

“True,” said the marquis, “and I would willingly recompense the action.”

“Recompense!” again echoed the enthusiastic girl; “recompense, to a mind, like his, would be insult.”

“You are a novice in the world,” pursued the marquis; “and judge by the rash criterion of appearance.”

“And not *action*?” questioned Juliette.

There was a reproach in the accent which flushed the cheek of the marquis; he turned from her, and, with an indif-

ference but ill assumed, addressed the count: but Montelioné, attentive to the foregoing conversation, heeded not his casual remark, but gallantly taking the hand of Louisine, observed—"Here, my lord, is a strong claim our deliverer holds upon our gratitude; in cherishing the friendship of this lady, we can never lose sight of the author of our introduction."

The marquis was a courtier; and the marquis, with the easy polish which ever marks the actions of a courtier, bowed his acquiescence.

From this period, though Juliette spoke not of Theodore, yet her heart lost not sight of his remembrance. Under the guise of gratitude she prayed for his happiness; and cherished the hope of yet again beholding him—of thank-
ing

ing him—of telling him her heart felt an interest in his welfare. Poor, poor Juliette! the snare was laid, the victim was ensnared, ere the danger was apparent. She dreamed not of love, even at the moment Love assumed his tyrannic empire.

In the ear of Louisine she could alone breathe the praises of Theodore; but even in her ear, even when friendship checked reserve, there was a timidity, a bashfulness, which blushed at the sigh of acknowledged interest.

But if the flight of time cemented the bonds of friendship, love also lurked within the Elysian groves of the abbey—Louisine was too lovely to be beheld with simple admiration; external charms may captivate the eye, but mental qualifications stamp an interest, excite an affection,

tion, not to be controuled—not to be resisted.

Such were the imperceptible gradations from esteem, to regard—to reverence—to adoration, which marked the quick progress in the heart of Montelioné; he had never analized his feelings, for he had never suspected their tendency; nor till Louisine, anxious to behold her father, and to remove from affection the heavy weight of corroding suspense, proposed a removal from the abbey, did he awaken from the trance; then he felt the inefficacy of resistance; and then, forgetful of his father's prejudices, he confessed the tale, and breathed the hopes of favour.

Varied were the emotions which agitated the bosom, which flushed the cheek of Louisine: 'tis true, she had
been

been nurtured in a cottage, yet did pride chase the momentary exultation, which gratified vanity, in the long and secretly cherished admiration of the count, had produced. She had been brought up in the humble sphere of mediocrity ; she had subsisted on the produce and exertions of industry ; yet she felt too proud clandestinely to espouse, and openly Montelioné dared not claim her. He knew, he deplored the prejudices of the marquis ; but to brave those prejudices, his heart whispered, would be entailing ruin on the head of the woman he sought to entrust with his future peace.

Vain—vain are the efforts of reason, when assailed by mutual and conciliating affection ; insufficient the powers of resistance, when combating the dangerous incitements of the heart. Louisine was

softened—Louisine was subdued—Louisine confessed the smothered hopes of prepossession; and Montelioné, in imagination, rose superior to every obstacle.

Hours, days, wore away, and the abbey became an Elysium; its groves were lightened by the blissful visions of anticipation, for futurity teemed with every good. Alas! under the pleasing delusions of mutual affection, how does the dangerous casuistry of the heart beguile the judgment, and render torpid the powers of action! borne on the resistless waves of passion, where lies the security for peace, when every expectation upon which it pends, centers in the influence of another?

“———Let youth beware of love—

Of the smooth glance beware: for 'tis too late,

When

When on the soul the torrent-softness pours ;
Then wisdom prostrate lies—while the fond soul,
Wrapt in gay visions of unreal bliss,
Still paints th' illusive form."

Though love's roseate wreaths fettered the heart of Louisine, still duty lost not her genial influence: affection for the indulgent author of her being, conveyed her thoughts to the peaceful vale he inhabited ; and, ever picturing the venerable image of her father, dashed even the assiduous attentions of Montelioné with the alloy of anxiety. In vain were the friendly arguments of the marchioness, of Juliette, of the count, essayed ; not till a messenger was dispatched to convey to the parental ear the glad tidings of her deliverance, could she be content to ensure her own safety, by a longer sojournment with friends, whose

power, and whose inclination alike con-joining, promised that protection the thatched roof of industry could ne'er bestow.

Louisine was at rest, for she had received the written sanction of her father. He predicted safety could no more be found beneath his humble thatch; and that the strong walls of religion could alone barricade the entrance against her powerful oppressor; yet he named not that oppressor; nay, he cautioned her not even in the ear of friendship to breathe the sound, for that safety depended on concealment.

Her heart sank at the charge: 'tis true, at the abbey she had never named Vermandois, yet in her turret prison, at the castle, she had been less guarded; there,
the

the enmity, and the enemy, had alike been revealed.

The caution of her father—the agitation of the duke, when first his eyes glanced out the cherished miniature of her mother—but above all, the counterpart of that miniature, which Theodore affirmed to have seen in the Castle de Vermandois, gave birth to a thousand ideas, of perplexing, though almost shapeless import. Wrapped in the trance of thought, without aim or motive, had she wandered into the shrubbery. Even the proffered love of Montelioné, was superseded by the despotic sway of circumstances; and every anticipation of the future absorbed in the reflection of the past.

The still twilight of evening shadowed, with deeper gloom, the umbrageous recesses

cesses of the shrubbery, and threw a softening tint o'er the vivid colours of creation. Louisine paused; approaching footsteps awakened her attention, and noted her abstraction with a smile.

Again she proceeded, for the sound died away; and imperceptibly losing the majestic turrets of Lurenville Abbey, her "mind's eye" pourtrayed the embosoming vale, which sheltered from the north's rough blasts her native cottage. Quick was the enumeration of its comforts, grateful the tear which noted the soft effusion of her feelings. Again did she wander midst the loved haunts of her childhood; again did she tend her father's footsteps, when, roused by the lark, he visited his little vineyard; and then succeeded her rambles to St. Mary's monastery; and then the caresses of the
nuns

nuns closed in the start of fear, for 'twas there she had first beheld Vermandois.

The pleasing reverie was dissolved, the chain of attraction broken ; Louisine looked up, and with surprise marked the extent of her ramble. She had lost sight of the abbey ; she had wandered beyond the shrubbery, and now stood in the centre of a valley, surrounded by softly-swelling hills, fringed with hanging woods, and watered by meandering rivulets. No sound was stirring ; the breeze of night was hushed ; and the silver splendour of the moonbeams, dappled with fantastic forms the picturesque lines of shade.

Alarmed, without knowing why, Louisine retraced her steps ; and, as she turned an angle in the valley, beheld the time-incrusted walls of the abbey, boldly
scited

scited on an opposite eminence, as though monarch of the waste. Gigantic were the hills which towered o'er its loftiest turret, and variegated the verdant luxuriance of the shrubs, which, matured by the mellowing favour of a southern aspect, had sprung into almost forest height.

She had nearly reached the low gate opening into the shrubbery, when she heard her name hastily pronounced, and the next moment beheld the count de Montelioné at her side. Palpable was her confusion ; a tell-tale blush glowed on her cheek ; and when he whispered delight at this rencontre,

“ No beauteous blossom of the fragrant spring,
Though the fair child of Nature, newly born,
Could be more lovely !”

Louisine

Louisine in vain attempted an indifference she could not feel ; in vain strove to damp the sanguine hopes of her lover, or, at least, to confine them within the pale of probability. But where exists the barrier which nips the aspiring flights of ardent love?—where the influence which can controul the wanderings of the heart? Nature, spurning the innovation of authority, proclaims the omnipotence of passion, and stamps her laws irreversible !

Montelioné baffled where he could not convince, silenced where he could not controvert ; he was all anticipation—all fervour—all hope ; he spoke of the known affection of the marquis, and dwelt on the mild palliatives of maternal interference. “ Yes, the marchioness will be my friend,” he exclaimed, as
eagerly

eagerly he snatched the soft hand of his companion ; “ she will plead my cause, and Nature will enforce my petition. My father will yield, sweetest Louisine, when resistance shall be vain ; he will recall us to favour—he will enrich us with his blessing.”

Louisine trembled ; she glanced, with timid caution, o’er the glowing features of the count, and then quickened her pace towards the abbey. But the ardent hopes of Montelioné were not to be thus foiled ; they were at once to be crushed, or to be realized.

“ Louisine,” he articulated, and gently he restrained her haste, “ ’tis for you to stamp my destiny—’tis for you to enrich it with bliss, or to drive me an alien from happiness and from home.”

He paused for a reply, but Louisine
spoke

spoke not; her eyes were bent upon the earth, and her features wore the cast of thought.

“Be mine,” he whispered, as ardently he perused a countenance, which the moon’s silver tints touched with an expression almost celestial. Louisine started—she gazed fearfully on him. “Yes, in the sight of Heaven,” he continued, hurried away by his feelings, “let the rites of the church sanctify a passion which nature and reflection eternalizes.”

“And your father—your family,” said the agitated girl.

“My mother, my sister, will receive, will welcome my lovely bride,” rejoined the enthusiastic Montelioné; “and my father will learn from them to appreciate the prize prejudice alone——”

“Ah!

“ Ah ! no, no,” interrupted Louisine ;
“ pride is a barrier which obstructs those
views—which destroys those wishes.”

“ Pride !” repeated the count.

“ Yes, pride, my lord,” resumed
Louisine, and a transient blush of spirit
heightened the carnation tint on her
cheek ; “ pride, which spurns an alliance
with unnoted indigence—and pride,
which bars the step of a clandestine en-
trance.”

“ You reject me,” faltered Monte-
lioné—Louisine’s eyes were suffused in
tears—“ you stamp me a victim to my
father’s prejudices. Ah, cruel girl ! love
sways not thus coldly—love, the master-
passion of the soul, yields not to stern
prudence, and cautious foresight.”

“ Then do I forswear its guidance,”
said

said Louisine. "Believe it so, my lord, and quick forget a being, who owns an influence superior to her feelings."

Again she hastened her pace, and again the count restrained her.

"Pardon me," he implored; "Louisine, gentle and forgiving, be you my guide—my directress; accept the controul of a heart, alive but to thy influence, impressed but with thy perfections."

Louisine smiled acquiescence; and, in the moment of conciliating confidence, acknowledged that happiness, nay, peace of mind, existed solely in his faith, and his affection.

Thus, alike biassed by the delusions of the heart, guising love in the garb of duty, and compromising a voluntary thralldom for the chains which pride
spurned

spurned at assuming, they returned to the abbey, Cupid laughing at his own casuistry, and slyly sharpening his arrow to prepare for the contest; for reflection comes when the scene of passion closes, and registers the lapse of reason, often with a pang of bitter tendency.

On reaching the saloon, the eyes of Juliette betrayed the tale of uneasiness; she had been weeping; and even then her sobs yielded not to her mother's arguments. "My sacrifice approaches," she replied, to the count's interrogatories; "to-morrow the duke de Vermandois visits the abbey."

Quick was the electric shock which iced the heart of Louisine; she spoke not, but her bleached cheek proclaimed her feelings; and, but for the interposing arm of the marchioness, deprived of
sense

sense and motion, she had fallen to the ground. Dismay and apprehension succeeded. Montelioné, thrown off his guard, heeded not the presence of his mother, but hung over her with that wild expression of sadness, which speaks a heart nearly and dearly interested.

It was long ere Louisine regained the power of speech—ere strength and recollection returned; and even then, the vague expression—the frenzied start of terror, awakened doubts of her sanity. “I must fly—I must quit the abbey,” she exclaimed; “this night—this hour, I must seek some new asylum.”

“What mean you?” softly interrogated the marchioness. “Danger lurks not here.”

“Oh, yes, yes!” quickly interrupted Louisine. “If he beholds me here, even
beneath

beneath this roof, murder will ensue—he seeks my life. — Lady, with love he wooed; and now, with malice infernal, drives me from my sanctuary.”

“ Who wooed?—who seeks your life?” demanded the marchioness.

Louisine glanced fearfully around, and then, burying her face in her hands, pronounced “ *Vermandois.*”

Juliette started: the cautions of the sister Laurette darted athwart her brain, and freedom seemed to dawn in the double accusation. But the marchioness, scarce crediting the evidence of her senses, repeated—“ *Vermandois;*” and the count, breathing assurances of safety, implored composure.

“ Explain,” urged Juliette; “ Louisine, uncloke the hypocrite, and snatch me from the fate I dread.”

“ Alas !”

“Alas!” faltered the agitated girl, “how can a being like me, unmarked, unaided, boasting no claims of birth, no privilege from fortune, accuse the prosperous son of greatness—stem the o’erwhelming tide of power?”

“Ah! do not question,” importuned Juliette; “do not question, but answer. Disclose the secret enmity which stamps Vermandois with a die so black?”

“Vermandois forced me from my father, and my home,” rejoined Louisine.

“Curse him!” burst from the lips of Montelioné.

The marchioness looked fearfully towards her son; but again her attention was recalled, for the shuddering Louisine continued—“Vermandois dragged me to the altar; but Heaven interposing, his revenge and hatred bound me a cap-

tive in my turret prison : and here, even here, Vermandois rises up to crush my hopes of safety."

"The altar?" demanded Montelioné, abruptly snatching her hand; "what interposition could snatch you from the altar? speak—speak," he implored, for Louisine continued silent; "if Vermandois has dared—if Vermandois——"

"Ah, no, no!" interrupting him, and she raised her eyes in pious appeal; "the saints can witness for me, the brightest moment in existence was that which snatched me from Vermandois' power!"

Montelioné smiled in blissful exultation; but the marchioness, still doubtful, demanded—"Can love so quickly change?—can caprice sway when passion dictates? mysterious girl! e'en now
there

there lies a lurking secret, which fancy cannot fathom."

Louisine mused in momentary irresolution, then, with trembling hand, drew forth the cherished miniature of her mother, and held it towards the marchioness. "Lady," she articulated, "this was the talisman which preserved me from dishonour; this the magic charm which changed e'en love to vengeance."

The marchioness started; electric was the impression; for as in the hands of the duke, so also in hers, did the miniature tremble. "Sainted Mary!" she ejaculated, and then, with quick and almost gasping energy, demanded, "what claim could stamp a value on that image?"

"Nature," replied Louisine. "Lady,

that miniature is the semblance of a sainted mother."

"Mother!" echoed the marchioness; "no, no, mistaken girl, this miniature bears no semblance to *your* mother."

"You knew her then?" questioned the agitated Louise.

"Knew her!" repeated the marchioness; "holy Heaven!" raising the miniature to her lips, "my bosom friend—my sister!"

"My mother your sister," faltered Louise; and she clung to the supporting arm of Montelioné.

"No, no, you are deceived," rejoined the marchioness. "True, the original of this portrait was my sister, but not your mother—your father lives?"

"Heaven grant it!" aspirated Louise.

"And

“And his name?”

“Du Plessis,” replied the trembling girl.

“Du Plessis,” repeated the marchioness; “Du Plessis was the steward of Vermandois’ wealth; how then could Vermandois’ wife be the mother of Du Plessis’ child?”

“My uncle, the husband my father has selected!” exclaimed the horror-struck Juliette.

“You are mistaken,” resumed the marchioness; “your uncle was the brother of the husband your father would give you. ’Tis a tragic story!” chasing the starting tear. “All lost in one sad night, the present duke became the heir of title and of fortune. But this picture,” again addressing Louisine, “fain

would I question, fain would I behold your father."

Louisine wept. "When my father gave me this picture," she sobbed, "he bade me guard it as I valued safety:" and then she breathed the same tale, which, in Vermandois' turret, she had before recited.

The marchioness was lost in thought; suddenly starting—"The hand of villany," she repeated; "did Du Plessis say the hand of villany had blasted greatness? Speak, Louisine—tell me all?—tell me what more he said?"

"Alas!" faltered Louisine, "he said my mother's rank, her sufferings, and her wrongs, merited a happier fortune; and that *fate veiled a tale of horror, which coming years might solve.*"

"Blessed

“Blessed Saints!” burst from the lips of the marchioness, and despair and doubt mingled in the expression of her countenance. “’Tis true, my hapless sister died by the hand of villany,” she continued. “Ah God! ’tis true she was murdered; but with her also fell her husband—daughter—son. Dreadful, dreadful the havoc of that night! but the castle pillaged left no room for doubt; and ’scaping with their plunder, the marauders fled. I must see—I must question Du Plessis,” again musing.

“I will hasten into Dauphine,” exclaimed Montelioné; “I will bring him hither, and sift the seeming mystery.”

“Ah! first remove me hence,” said Louisine, snatching the hand of the marchioness with imploring fervor. “If Vermandois sees me—if he finds I live—

what spot, what power, can shield me from his vengeance! Lady, you do not know him. Leagued with a ruffian band, he owns no law but inclination—he admits no power but will.”

Juliette sprung to the feet of the marchioness.—“Mother,” she said, “’tis I too solicit mercy; for in your interference alone can I hope for safety. Warn my father of the danger—tell him Vermandois is a murderer—tell him——”

“Rash, unthinking girl,” interrupted the marchioness, “know you the serious tenor of your charge? Beware, nor through the force of prejudice lose sight of justice.”

“It is not prejudice,” replied Juliette. “Bid him refute the charge; bid him seek his accuser in the convent of Bena Copia.”

“What

“What mean you?” questioned the count; and then Juliette recounted the curses with which the sister Laurette had branded the name of Vermandois.

Quick was spread a fresh field for conjecture and suspicion; but far be it from us to resolve the doubts which crowded on the mind of each individual; suffice it to say, actuated by motives of fear and caution, it was decided for Louisine, at daybreak, to remove to the convent of Bena Copia; and the whole imagined discovery, for the present, to be concealed from the marquis.

CHAP. VII.

———“ Fate, I wield thee !

’Tis at my sov’reign will Vermandois moves—

Breathes—acts. One glance, one word, shall whirl
him from

The pinnacle of greatness, and plunge him

In the fiery gulph of hell.”

.....

Oh ! what a conflict do I feel ! how am I

Toss’d like a ship, ’twixt two encount’ring tides.

DENHAM.

DAY’S bright eye had glared o’er the gloomy battlements of Vermandois, when Theodore, awakening from a blissful dream, sprung from his couch at the rude entrance of Montauban. Passion distorted every feature of the bandit, and gave to his giant form an expression of demoniac wildness. His hand grasped the dirk which lay sheathed in
his

his girdle, as fiercely he approached the youth. "Boy," he exclaimed, "be quick, and answer me ; where have you hid the intruders, who last night sojourned beneath this roof?"

"They are beyond the reach of your power," replied Theodore, with an exultation he could but ill conceal. "Father," and he looked boldly in the infuriated countenance of the chief, "I have saved your conscience from the damning stain of murder!"

"Where have you hid them?" again demanded Montauban.

"They are not hid," answered Theodore; "they require not the cover of concealment. 'Twas I who gave them liberty—'twas I, the favoured instrument of Heaven's mercy, who, stealing the hapless captive from the watch-tower,

gave her to the protection of the count de Montelioné."

Deadly was the glance of Montauban's eye—impious the curse which muttered on his lip; the dirk was unsheathed—the arm was uplifted—the stroke was already aimed—when a voice from the corridor pronounced—" *Vermandois' heir;*" and instantly the hand of the bandit, as though each nerve was blasted, dropped the dirk.

Theodore shrunk not: he traced the influence of fear in the guilt-impressed countenance of his father; but he sought not in flight, either to ensure safety, or to discover the mysterious interposition.

"Was it fancy?" interrogated the still-trembling Montauban, grasping the arm of the undaunted Theodore—" Say, boy,

boy, did my ears deceive me? or did that appalling—that retributive voice check the fell stroke of my revenge?”

“No, ’twas not fancy,” replied Theodore: “but for that voice, my life had now been closed. Be grateful; Heaven gives you warning; and bids you not, with impious hand, to dash the promised good.”

“Strange,” murmured the bandit, eyeing his young reprover. “Has death no terrors? can you behold, nor fear to meet the stroke?”

“Fear,” echoed Theodore; “no, no, I have no fear. The friend who taught me how to live, has taught me how to die. ’Tis for the soul humbled in guilt—the weak, the yielding slave of passion’s quick unhallowed gust—’tis for that soul, to see and shudder at futurity.”

“I have

“ I have armed him ’gainst myself,” exclaimed Montauban, regaining the dirk, and sheathing it in his girdle. “ Theodore, I cannot harm you : guarded by some invisible power——”

“ Ah no ! ’tis Nature,” interrupted Theodore, “ Nature which bids you spare the life you gave.”

The bandit smiled. “ Believe so,” he said ; then quick demanded an explanation of the last night’s actions.

“ First, promise to hear me with patience,” said Theodore, “ and then the seeming mystery shall be revealed.”

“ Proceed,” exclaimed Montauban.

Theodore no longer hesitated ; he related the conversation he had overheard between Montauban and Randolphe, and the vow he had himself made to liberate the captive.

“ Theodore,

“Theodore, your mercy is misplaced,” said the bandit ; “you have but protracted a fate, which Vermandois’ hatred had sealed.”

“Are you the engine of Vermandois’ power?” demanded Theodore ; “are you the ready tool of Vermandois’ tyranny?”

Montauban frowned.

“If you are,” pursued the youth, “quick, rouse yourself from the trance ; shake off the badge of sin, and tell your ruler——”

“Ruler,” echoed the chief ; “boy, ’tis false ; Vermandois is my slave ; he dares not resist when I command ; he dares not hesitate when I enjoin. Guilt has forged his chain, and justice sways the rod. Were he to brave my power, I’d hurl him from
his

his seat; I'd goad, I'd teach him to feel—to own Montauban's strength."

"You," articulated Theodore—"Holy Mother! boast you the power to save, and can you hesitate? Father, not for a life, but for a soul I plead, your own, yes, yes, your soul's eternal peace—your soul's eternal welfare: snatch it from destruction's fiery gulph, and claim from mercy's act one hope of future favour."

"What mean you?" questioned the bandit.

"Spare from Vermandois' rage the turret captive," replied Theodore.

Montauban mused, then suddenly starting—"She's fled, she's 'scaped me; though if in France, if——"

He paused. "Proceed," implored Theodore.

"If

“ If within the reach of power,” rejoined Montauban, “ if within the stretch of authority, her privilege to breathe is short. Vermandois spares not ; fate once prescribed, his sharpened steel’s unerring.”

“ *His*,” repeated the shuddering Theodore.—“ God of nature ! can fervent love be turned to bitterness ? can man, with rage infernal, commit a deed which demons cannot sanction ?”

“ *His*, in a thousand hands,” observed Montauban, smiling ; “ his gold, the quickening spur ; for even blood can find its price.”

“ Is there no means—is there no spot can offer safety ?” interrogated Theodore.—“ Ah ! let me fly : some secret inspiration glows within my heart, and urges me to rescue—I have sworn—I have

have vowed—yes, now, this moment,” springing to the door; but Montauban held him.

“Whither would you go, boy?” he demanded.

“To save the unfortunate,” replied our hero—“to rescue the devoted child of Du Plessis.”

The bandit grasped his arm; electric was the fire which darted from his eyes, deep the expression of his subtle features. “Du Plessis,” he repeated, “Du Plessis, the father of Vermandois’ destined victim——”

“And her mother,” exclaimed Theodore, catching the infection of doubt, “her mother’s portrait now hangs in the east gallery of this castle.”

Montauban shrunk within himself; he seemed insensible even to the scrutiniz-

ing

ing observation of his son. "Hypocrite!" he muttered, "false and deceitful rebel to the sworn bond of confidence! yes, I will blast thee—I will tear the hidden guise, and teach thee what it is to dare a spirit like mine. Theodore," in a voice of thunder, "where have you hid the captive?"

The youth gazed on him with irresolution and doubt.

"Fear not to tell me," resumed Montauban—"I espouse her cause—I, too, will save her."

"Eternal Powers, I thank ye!" said the youth, springing to his feet, and grasping his hand with the first faint pressure of affection.

"Proceed," said Montauban. "This burst of enthusiasmsavours of the brethren
of

of Valombre. Speak—tell me her chance of safety?”

“It is beneath the roof of the marquis de Lurenville,” replied Theodore, “cheered by the friendship of the lady Juliette, secure in the promised protection of the count de Montelioné.”

“Then is she lost,” articulated the bandit—“Vermandois seeks his bride, and finds his victim.”

Theodore’s heart sank ; a sudden pang assailed him—a pang which veiled in sadness every thought, and blighted every expectation—*Vermandois’ seeks his bride*, was as a death-peal in his ear ; and e’en the preservation of Louisine was momentarily forgotten. “Can a father doom his offspring to destruction?” he faltered. —“All-seeing Heaven ! can the world’s infection so poison the stream of nature and of feeling?” “The

“ The marquis de Lurenville,” said Montauban, “ is the slave of ambition : he owns no other influence ; he submits to no other sway.”

“ And will the feelings of the heart cede to an authority so coercive ?” questioned Theodore.

“ The outward actions are alone sufficient,” replied the bandit, smiling ; “ ’tis the hand to ratify the bond ambition formed ; the soul, superior to human power, dare scoff at threats the body cannot brave.”

“ Perhaps,” observed Theodore, after the hesitation of a moment, “ the marquis knows not the blackening stamp of Vermandois’ actions : what if I warn—what if I disclose them ?”

“ You !” exclaimed Montauban, with a sneer of mingled contempt and irony :

“ where,

“ where, but from énvý, can be traced the accusation ? ”

“ Envy,” repeated Theodore, his pride, his spirit mounting at the charge ; “ you mistake ; ’tis not from a source so base my motive springs. No, no, angelic maid ! the chosen being who with thy spotless heart claims kindred—the being who reigns in spite of tyrant will, who, perhaps unknown, colours the sigh of soft complaining, and stamps a dear, a sovereign influence in thy virgin bosom—that being——”

“ Who knows,” interrupted Montauban, with an expression which flushed the cheeks of his companion, “ who knows but you are the secret, the cherished instigator, which wars against her duty ? who knows——”

“ Me ! ”

“ Me ! ” exclaimed the ardent Theodore—“ Holy Heaven ! if I thought so.”

“ What then ? ” questioned the bandit.

“ I would fly—I would snatch her from impending fate, or perish.”

“ You would breathe the tale of love,” artfully insinuated Montauban, “ and erect your triumph on her inexperience.”

Theodore glanced on the speaker a look of disdain and scorn, a look of proud superiority ; yet he remembered him his father, and checked the burst of passion that was quick arising.

“ You would wed her,” again observed Montauban.

“ I would place her in safety,” said Theodore ; “ I would worship her in distance ; but never, never establish my happiness on her degradation.”

Again an ironical smile marked the
expression

expression of Montauban's countenance. "Theodore," he replied, "you gift yourself with powers you do not possess; you are a novice, but no stoic: your safety lies in evading, not braving temptation. Beauty's soft alluring smile would quick o'erthrow this mound of self-denial, and poison e'en the sway of Valombre's counsels."

"Ah no!" exclaimed Theodore. "Honour, with giant guard, measures each vagrant thought, and scorns the shaft of satire in the cause of virtue."

"Be the trial essayed," said Montauban, moving towards the door. "Tomorrow you shall repair to Lurenville abbey; there you shall caution Louisine of danger; there you shall encounter the witchery of Juliette."

But the morrow dawned on our hero
in

in a new calling—the morrow dawned on him watching by the couch of the wounded Montauban. Defeated in an unsuccessful assault upon a party of travellers, one of the banditti had been killed, and their chief conveyed senseless to the castle. Painful was delay to the glowing hopes of impetuous passion. Already prepared for his journey, watching the ebon clouds of night, and hailing with rapture the first faint gleam of morning; in imagination gazing on the beauteous image of his heart's idol; now pressing the ebony cross to his lips, and now addressing his prayers to Heaven, Theodore had long paced the court-yard in expectation of the bandit's return—he did return, but hope sickened at the view—he returned bleeding, helpless—he returned to claim the attentions of his son,

and disappointment blighted every scene of bliss.

Submitting to the task of duty, Theodore, with ceaseless care, watched the fevered slumbers of Montauban ; one moment shuddering at the muttered execrations of impiety, the next labouring to work conversion. But returning health checked the softly-stealing sway of interest, and a whole month bore but a rayless blank, for Louisine was unwarned—Juliette unseen—Montauban unrepentant.

Released from the tax of an attendance which produced but mortification and regret, Theodore again beheld the day dawn destined for his visit to the abbey. "Theodore," said the bandit, joining him in the court-yard, and reading impatience in his looks, "you go invested
with

with an office you are but ill-calculated to fulfil. Louisine may be removed; but Juliette mocks your efforts. What is your accusation opposed to established power? what the mite of your strength compared to riches and worldly fame?" Theodore's eyes sank in despondence, conviction saddened his features, and a heavy sigh burst from his heart.

"I pity you," resumed Montauban, "because you are the slave of your own feelings; I will aid you, because, in spite of myself, you have wrought an interest. Take this letter. Dive not within its secret folds. It is directed to Verman-
dois. Hide yourself till the moment of delivery; and even though it be at the altar, the lady Juliette shall be free. Go, Theodore; doubt not my power; it is

absolute—Vermandois dares not oppose me.”

Theodore, in gratitude, pressed the hand of his father; he would have poured forth his feelings, but the bandit checked him. “Time is precious,” he said, pausing beneath the gateway; “fly; guard well the letter, and be Juliette the reward!”

“Yes, with life!” exclaimed Theodore, crossing the drawbridge; and ere the sun had risen in splendor, he had passed the boundary of the pine-forest. Buoyed on the burnished pinions of Hope, yielding to the fairy-play of imagination, and picturing in each light recess the sylphid form of Juliette, Theodore, insensible to distance and to danger, eagerly pursued his route.

It

It was humanity which pleaded for Louisine, but it was love which planned the defeat of Vermandois' pretensions—love which armed him with oratory, with perseverance, with courage to combat the prejudices of the marquis—to brave the awakening vengeance of the duke; for what will not love essay in defence of its object? to what will not the heart sacrifice, when its hopes and its anticipations are alike threatened?—It was noon when Theodore beheld the stately towers of Lurenville abbey; when, pausing, his eyes measured the dwelling which contained the being his heart so faithfully cherished—Ah! deep was the sigh which swelled his pent-up bosom, scalding the tear which trickled down his cheek! Fate had imposed an impenetrable barrier, and the treasured secret of his soul was

destined to be untold—to be unblessed.

Fearful of intruding, unknowing how to act, he sought shelter within a peasant's cabin; and there he wore away the day, in plans of introduction, and in listening to the loquacious descriptions of his hostess, as she dwelt on the grand preparations for the approaching nuptials of the lady Juliette. Theodore's heart sickened at the detail; yet did he propose a thousand questions of torture, and await the responses with almost breathless impatience. One moment he was for presenting himself before the marquis, and boldly accusing the duke de Vermandois of villany and disguise; but the next, betraying its inefficacy, defeated the design. Then he was for enclosing to the lady Juliette, as a signal of his approach, the ebony cross she
had

had granted to his entreaties: but she might reject it—she might retain the pledge; the first would be disappointment—the last would be agony. “No, no,” he exclaimed, gazing on the pendant treasure; “never, but in death, will we know a separation.”

He snatched his hat—he fled from the cottage—he crossed the park—he pierced e’en the boundary of the pleasure-grounds. The sun was setting; its vivid tints glowed in the horizon, decking the face of nature with burnished glory. Theodore’s heart panted with new-created fervor; it swelled, it throbbed with sensations of unknown, of delightful import. He inhaled the same air; he gazed on the same objects which had awakened the attention of Juliette; nay, he wandered o’er the same sward which had oft

been impressed with her light footsteps: what could he wish beyond—what could he picture as an augmentation to the bliss of his present reverie! Suddenly he paused—he hesitated; not fear, but doubt, enchained him, for he lost a female form in the opposite grove. It might be Juliette. The impulse and the action were one. Hope gave him wings, and, with swift and noiseless steps, he hurried forward.

Again he traced the translucent veil waving in the breeze; and again he hesitated: he shrunk within the enclustering foliage of the shrubs, for he saw her pause on the thatched-roof threshold of a picturesque hermitage. Scarce daring to breathe, his eyes were rivetted on the form, and every power of action appeared suspended, when throwing back
the

the veil, he traced the faultless features of Juliette.

He saw her shrink within the deepening gloom of the hermitage. He feared to intrude upon her solitude; yet drawn, as it were, by an irresistible influence, he stole towards it. He heard her weep, and then, between the deep sobs of her complaint, he heard her articulate—
 “Wretched, wretched alternative, to act with duty, but at the expence of peace; to stamp with criminality a passion which gratitude and nature sanctions!”

Theodore could scarcely breathe, for he heard her sigh; and then again she murmured—“Restored to freedom, the more to be enslaved. Oh, Theodore! Theodore! dear, mysterious benefactor!”

The youth sprung forward—the youth was at her feet.

Faint was the shriek of Juliette ; alike electric was the impulse and the effect. She was senseless—she was clasped with frenzied fervor to his bosom ; and the warm tears of his regrets fell unheeded on her cheek. In vain he breathed her name—in vain he poured forth the sigh of adoration ; she was insensible alike to the complaints of woe—to the efforts of anxiety. Tortured by a thousand nameless fears, now deploring the consequences of impetuosity, and now, forgetful of the long-conned lessons of disinterested respect, pressing his parched lips to the cold forehead of Juliette, the youth hung over her, almost dead to hope—almost lost in the torpor of despair.

Sweet as the music of the spheres was the balmy sigh of renovating life !—dear as peace to the bereaved, her faint struggle

gle for freedom!—"Fear not, lady," whispered Theodore; "reverence, respect, alone actuates the heart now throbbing under the precious spell your clemency awarded."

Juliette raised her languid eyes to the face of her lover; ah! that look, that smile, mocked caution—banished reserve!

Theodore was the child of nature and of feeling; Theodore's brain was bewildered by a chaos of wild thoughts.—"Deceitful, hateful, accursed world!" he articulated, grasping between his own the cold, the deathlike hand of Juliette.

Sometimes in silence the heart is most eloquent: Juliette spoke not; but though she turned away her face, the convulsive heavings of her bosom betrayed her agi-

tation. Her hand was passive ; it trembled, but it was not withdrawn. Theodore's lips were pressed upon it, but no indication of displeasure attempted its removal. Violent was the conflict between the native dignity of principle and impassioned feeling. Dearest, tenderest hopes fluttered round his heart, o'erthrowing reason, fortitude, resolution ; for love's poignant delights, love's anxious pangs, o'ersteps every barrier militating against its extravagant decisions. Short was the lapse—his father, a robber, a murderer, darted o'er his brain, and instantly the snowy hand of Juliette was relinquished.—“Lady,” he articulated, “pardon a wretch, whom condescension has made presumptuous.”

“Condescension !” echoed Juliette, burying her burning face in her hands ;

“ah,

“ah, leave me, fly me ! my feeble heart has betrayed its too rapid impression. Holy Mary !” and shuddering, she hastened towards the door, “you have read my secret, and now despise, now condemn——”

Again the youth was at her feet—
 “Despise—condemn,” interrupting her.
 “Lady, if you could read this heart, if you could pierce the secrets of this bosom, you would know when love, consuming love, became its inmate. You would know, at the profession of the sister Monique, at the shrine of Bena Copia, it inhaled a passion it can never lose.”

Juliette mused for a moment, then suddenly turning, her cheeks glowing with the rich tide of her ideas, and her eyes beaming with new-fraught lustre—

“You

“ You have saved me,” she exclaimed, “ when death and ruin threatened : you have been my preserver, where thought pictured a preserver could not enter. Again befriend—again snatch me from despair.”

“ Command my life,” exclaimed Theodore ; “ lady, it is yours : name but the enterprise, and my ready ardour meets it.”

“ Save me from Vermandois,” she murmured, and her trembling hand grasped the arm to which she clung for support. “ He comes—he drags me to the altar. My father, unrelenting, sanctions the deed which blasts all future comfort.”

“ Holy Saints !” exclaimed Theodore, “ it is on that mission I have flown hither—it is to remove Louisine—it is to forewarn

forewarn the marquis, that I have again braved the peril of your charms."

"Louisine is in safety," said Juliette; "is secure from every danger; is under the protection of the lady abbess of Bena Copia."

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the youth: and then he listened to the recital of all which had transpired since the moment of separation at the Castle de Vermandois. "I have wept, I have implored," said Juliette, in reply to Theodore's reurged project of addressing the marquis: "in vain my mother, in vain my brother, have alike used every exertion of influence; my father is inflexible, and Heaven alone can shield me."

"I can," exclaimed Theodore, remembering the sealed packet of Montauban.

ban. “Lady, fear not. I possess the power—I possess the charm. In spite of fate, Vermandois shall, even at the altar, withdraw his pretensions.”

Juliette gazed on him with wonder and amazement; every feeling of her heart was awakened; for oh! how warm, how fervent are the powers of gratitude, when the benefactor is beloved! “Ah! by you to be a second time redeemed!” she said; “tell me—tell me the being to whom I owe so much?”

“Do not ask me,” replied our hero, his spirits sickening at the inquiry; “fain would I hide it from myself.”

“My preserver,” faltered Juliette.

“Know me by that blessed name,” rejoined Theodore; “for though my crime be presumptuous love, though my
birth

birth be base, my condition abject, still I possess a soul that scorns, that shrinks from dishonour. Lady——”

But the sound of footsteps stole on the breeze, and Juliette whispered—“We must part.”

Theodore started in agony—“Part!” he repeated, and he pressed the hand of Juliette, “not for ever—say, not for ever. Here, once more let us meet; here, in this hermitage, be my heart again probed. Lady, you shall know all; and may the agony of confession appease the indignation of resentment.”

He darted from her; but ere he crossed the threshold, he exclaimed—“To-morrow—at this hour—in this spot.” He waited not for an answer; he struck midst the thick entwining shrubs, nor paused till he had passed the boundary of the pleasure-grounds. CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

———A crowd of thoughts,

Doubting, discordant, tumult in my breast,

Unsettling my resolves.—What should I think ?

Suspicion may inquire, but must not judge.

MALLET.

DAY had scarcely unveiled the shrouded face of Nature, had scarcely, midst the promiscuous chaos of obscurity, traced the faint line of her gigantic features, when Louisine, eager to attain the promised bourne of safety, watched the expected signal of departure.

Long the sport of fortune, long persecuted by a being, the cause of whose enmity she could not guess, torn from her home—severed from the safeguard of a father's arms—preserved from a ruffian band by the philanthropy of a stranger,

ger, she was again compelled to fly an asylum, which love and friendship stamped with peculiar interest ; again destined to seek in obscurity a place of refuge.

Stationed at the window, her eyes fixed on the slow progress of expanding radiance, her thoughts revising the incidents of her short, but eventful life, she marked not the entrance of Juliette ; nor, till the soft regrets of friendship reached her ear, did she know that her sorrows and her tears were noted.

Juliette whispered a thousand tender professions, but Louisine could only weep. Her heart was full ; misfortune threatened to overwhelm, and danger and persecution to tend her lowly footsteps. " At Bena Copia you will be happy," said Juliette ; " sister Monique will

will be your friend, and sister Lucille will be your counsellor."

Louisine sighed—"Would I might return to their society," she mournfully added, "for, in truth, the world has nothing to offer!"

As she spoke, her eyes glancing on her bosom, missed the ebony cross: the form of Theodore arose to view, and vivid was the blush which mantled her features. "Were you content when an inmate of the convent?" interrogated Louisine; "did you ne'er pine for emancipation?—did you ne'er picture the allurements of the world?"

"Oh, no, no!" eagerly replied Juliette; "the saints witness for me, tears and repugnance marked my removal from Bena Copia. I petitioned the marquis

quis to give me to religion, as a blessed alternative from an union from which my heart shrunk; but he rejected my prayers, and sternly told me my duty was obedience."

"And would you now," demanded Louisine, "take the veil with a heart as willing?"

Juliette hesitated; her eyes sank in bashful diffidence; then throwing her arms around the neck of her friend, and hiding her glowing cheek on her bosom, she softly asked—"Does not memory recall the hour of peril, and gratitude register the image of a deliverer?"

Louisine smiled, notwithstanding the sorrows which oppressed her own heart. "Most true," she replied; "gratitude, tinging the soul's orisons, taints not the pure homage of a vestal's offering."

"And

“And where would be the sin,” questioned Juliette, “should gratitude, piercing the boundary of restriction, pant to behold a deliverer—pant to acknowledge a benefice?”

“Severe are the rules of conventual subordination,” said Louisine. “In the cloister of St. Mary, I have heard the vow of initiation includes the regulation of the thoughts as of the actions.”

“Ah! then I must not be a nun,” concluded Juliette.

A low tap at the door checked all further discourse; and Montelioné, desponding and dispirited, awaiting himself to conduct Louisine to the carriage, again called forth her tears. Painful was the moment of adieu—agonizing the pang of separation. In vain Louisine rallied her spirits; in vain she looked forward to
the

the peaceful calm of retirement. Her hand still glowed with the fervent pressure of affection; and fancy, mocking the stretch of distance, still pictured the saddened features of her lover.

Wrapped in the trance of her own thoughts, the rich, the luxuriant scenes of cultivation were unheeded; nor even did her eyes wander in admiration, when ascending the mountainous heights of the Pyrenees, Nature towered in cloud-capped sublimity.

Unthreatened by danger, unimpeded by accident, she reached the promised asylum of repose; and was received by the mother superior of Bena Copia with the cordial warmth of friendly interest.

The holy sisterhood, with attention and courtesy, banished the caution of reserve, and asked a thousand questions
respecting

respecting their little favourite, Juliette.

Calm were the slumbers of Louisine's first night's sojournment beneath the roof of the monastery ; no start of terror snapped the silken bonds of repose ; no fearful dream, teeming with impending danger, fanned the idle sway of superstition. She arose at the call of the matin bell, and bent her knee at the altar of her faith, with a heart elevated with the piety of devotion.

Unchequered is ever the tenor of a monastic life ; for how can the infliction of penance—how can the monotony of prayer—how can the sigh of remorse—how can the patient smile of endurance, interest in the detail ?

It was at the close of the midnight mass, immediately after the departure of the nuns, that Louisine lingered in

the

the chapel to aid the sister Monique in extinguishing the tapers. Her spirits had caught the infection of sadness, and her eyes had shed tears for a being she had never seen; for she had joined in the fervour of prayer, and petitioned Heaven for mercy on a suffering sinner. The chapel was already darkened, and her hand was upraised to extinguish the last taper, burning before the altar, when a loud and piercing shriek numbed every power of action. The nun slowly dropped the beads of her rosary.

“Holy Virgin!” ejaculated Louisine.

“It is the poor sufferer for whom our prayers have been offered,” said the sister.

“A maniac?” demanded the horror-struck girl.

The nun again murmured an Ave-

Maria, for the narrow aisles re-echoed the frenzy of delirium; then, with a deep sigh, replied—"A maniac, through the corroding anguish of a conscience-stricken heart."

"You know her woes?" said Louisine.

"Oh, no!" was the response; "there lies the hidden gangrene; would she confess, would she relate those woes, a balm might be administered; but she is self-willed, even to her own undoing; and because she has once rejected the prayers of man, she cancels ever the momentary concession of remorse."

"Has she no friend?" again questioned the attentive Louisine.

"Every member of Bena Copia is her friend," replied the nun.

"True, sister; but is there not one favoured ear, divested of seeming authority,

thority, into which the sigh of confidence might steal? It is not the studied language of seeming concern, neither is it the intrusive professions of courtesy, that claims the heart; 'tis that deep, that instinctive interest, armed in the double guise of sympathy and love, which subdues e'en nature's reserve, and conquers the forbidden obstacles of habit."

"Years has the sister Laurette been an inmate of these walls," resumed the nun, "yet has not reserve yielded to kindness; menace has alike proved powerless; and all that the attentive ear can glean, falls through the sudden gust of passion, or the unconscious fever of frenzy. Three nights previous to your arrival at our cloister, though the rain poured, and the earth rocked beneath the tempest's fury, yet could we not with-

hold her from braving its rough peltings. She had wept much at witnessing the interment of a lay-sister, whose Christian piety, and whose patient resignation, during the heavy trial of a long, long illness, had robbed the bed of death of all its terrors. She fled from the chapel to the garden, defended but by her veil, and armed but by her feelings——”

“ Poor sufferer !” interrupted Louisine.

“ It was long ere we missed her,” resumed sister Monique ; “ and even then our persuasions were ineffectual ; she smiled at our remonstrances, told us the rain would cool the burning fire in her brain, and that caution belonged to the happy.”

“ And did you leave her ?” reproachfully questioned Louisine.

“ We

“ We left her,” rejoined the sister, meekly crossing her bosom, “ in the hope that a self-enacted penance would prelude the grace of confession. But, alas ! it availed not ; sister Laurette returned with an aspect desolate, but with a heart unchanged. It was long ere she would throw aside her wet and comfortless garments, but even then the caution was ineffectual : aided by a distempered mind, the feverish heat gained ground—it baffled all our skill—it seized upon her brain—and the next night, as now, chained her a helpless tenant in her cell.”

“ A candidate for kindness,” sighed the sympathizing Louisine.

Again the piercing plaint of the suffering Laurette betrayed the overthrow of reason. “ Holy Heaven !” raising

her clasped hands, "what sound is half so woe-fraught!"

The nun echoed back her sigh. The nun possessed a heart, whose tender sympathy survived the dull apathy of seclusion, and wept and bled even for a sinner's woes.

"In her wanderings," again questioned Louisine, as quitting the chapel they passed down the cloisters, "has she ne'er betrayed the hidden tale, which to threat and entreaty has been withheld?"

"Alas!" murmured the sister, "despair and guilt colours her incoherent flights, and even in sleep peoples her cell with spectre horrors. She talks of murder—says that her hands are steeped in blood—then tells us not to pity, but to pray."

"Surely,"

“ Surely,” observed Louisine, “ that wish betrays the penitent.”

“ Our poor sister owns no marked character,” said the nun ; “ her every action, her every expression, speaks inconsistency and indecision. But I must away. Farewell, my young friend ! duty calls me to the sufferer’s pallet ; ’tis my turn to watch to-night.”

Louisine stretched forth her hand to stay the fleeting steps of the nun, but she was gone ; the waving folds of her veil marked her quick receding figure, as the dying echo of a closing door restored the reign of silence.

The night was long and sleepless ; Louisine mused on the sufferings of the sister Laurette, till even the recollection of her own sorrows gave place to sympathetic interest. She arose ere the ma-

tin bell had sounded, and watched the approach of sister Monique with eager impatience.—“Alas!” you have been weeping,” she said, as she marked the tear-fraught eyes of the nun.

“True,” replied the sister; “pity is a boon which human misery craves—which human feeling cannot withhold; the necessity for exertion passed, compassion mourns the fate it cannot aid.”

“Is the poor sufferer so lost—so destitute?” demanded Louisine.

“Lost to earthly exertion—destitute of earthly comfort,” rejoined Monique: “but Heaven’s high wisdom is omnipotent, and often rives the heart to work salvation. Ah! could the waverer visit her lone cell, and trace the moving anguish of her features—could she but hear the pent-up sigh of grief—could she but

see

see the start of fear, and mark the plaintive lamentations of remorse, firm would be her footing, and conviction an adamant shield to innocence. She fears to die—she fears to pierce the grave's still horrors—she prays for succour, not mercy—she languishes for life, although her days are rayless.”

“Miserable victim of misjudging sin !” sighed Louisine.

“Last night,” pursued the nun, “after I had trimmed her lamp, and smoothed her pillow—when exhausted nature sanctioned the hope of repose, and I softly took my station in watchful caution, she started erect ; she gazed wildly round the cell, and then, with a shriek, which still rings in my ear, bade me save her from Montauban's power. ‘The murderer triumphs,’ she exclaimed. ‘What, wretch,

wretch, must they all—all die? Not one little spark of mercy ;’ and then she buried her face in her hands; and then again she shrieked, and vowed the dagger was unerring.”

“ Montauban !” echoed Louisine, whose every feature betrayed amazement; “ all-seeing Heaven ! the bandit Montauban !”

Sister Monique grasped her hand, and silently awaited an explanation.

Again Louisine passed o’er the early hopes of infancy, the first dawnings of care, and the gradual progress of misfortune. But when she spoke of the duke de Vermandois—his love—his quick transition to hatred—his resignation of her to Montauban’s care, the wonder of the nun increased to a height of painful interest. “ Holy Mary !” she articulated,

lated, raising to her lips the pure emblem of her faith, "how full of sin—how full of subtilty is the heart of man! how does he labour to sow the seeds of care and coming sorrows! What if I whisper Vermandois in the ear of Laurette?" addressing Louisine.

"Alas! sister, the expedient could effect but little."

"It might effect much more than we imagine," said the nun; "it might recall the past, and give repentance to the future. Who knows, her soul once probed——"

"Possibly," interrupted Louisine, "she never heard Vermandois named."

"But Montauban," said the nun.

"True, sister; yet the world may contain more than one Montauban."

The nun mused ; suddenly starting—
“ Laurette talked of murder—of blood—
of Montauban’s power : you talk of
Montauban as a plunderer—an assassin
—as heading a troop of brigands—ah !
can there be two Montaubans so similar ?
—can there be two Montaubans so de-
nounced ? ”

“ Sister Laurette has been years a
member of Bena Copia,” observed Lou-
isine ; “ months only have elapsed since
I escaped the bandit’s power.”

“ True,” said the nun.

“ And though,” pursued Louisine, “ the
woes of sister Laurette are traced to the
unrelenting villany of the same Montau-
ban, my wrongs can form no link in
the concatenation.”

“ Heaven is all-sufficient ! ” murmured
the

the nun ; “ ere now, causes of great moment have been traced from lesser circumstances.”

“ Your words are enigmatical,” said the astonished girl.—“ Sister,” and attentively she marked the features of the recluse, “ what similarity can be traced in distances so opposite ?”

“ It is not for me to arrogate the wisdom of Omnipotence,” mildly replied Monique, “ but surmise will work, and give colour oft to improbability. Question me no further. Let us to prayers ; and leave to time the disclosure of events.”

A week, a fortnight, wore away, and weakness still claimed the attentions of the sisterhood, still chained the suffering Laurette to her cell ; but though Louise saw her not, she heard retold the pathetic

thetic flights of her delirium, and all the idle train which superstition cherished ; sometimes it was the avenging spirit of the murdered, but oftener the aroused wrath of the Eternal.

Buried in the sombre gloom of fanaticism, estranged from the convivial haunts of society, from every pursuit save abstinence and prayer, the mind imperceptibly becomes the slave of habit, and exchanges all the play of action, for jaundiced care and deep-corroding melancholy ; the heart, marbled even in life, lost to the claims of affection, throbbing with the measured pulsation of apathy, loses all interest in the present in preparation for the future. Louisine had twice received the gratifying token of remembrance ; twice had Juliette penned the persevering assurances of friendship,

ship,

ship, and tenderly was the epistle cherished, because each page teemed with the devotion of Montelioné; affection glowed in each expression: but caution marked not the name of the duke de Vermandois, or the interesting impression of their deliverer Theodore: perhaps fear checked the flights of her pen, for never, even in thought, was confidence suspected. She had also heard from her beloved father, and anxiety slumbered, for his health and his strength were gradually amending. He talked of visiting the retreat of his child, and revealing a secret he had long and cautiously preserved.—“A thousand fears assail me,” wrote the anxious Du Plessis; “fears, my Louisine, which threaten your safety, nay, your life. I dare not remove you from Bena Copia, lest the guilty fiend

fiend Vermandois should mark our movements, and tear you from my feeble arms. Alas! small is my power 'gainst a spirit so daring; insignificant my strength to cope with his command of numbers. Conscience cannot sting him, for he is dead to its reproaches; justice cannot reach him, for poverty stagnates the spring of my exertions, and riches too often sways the award of power. Oh, injured, persecuted offspring of an ill-fated pair!—unhappy victim of crime and dire ambition!—hurled from the brilliant scenes of early promise, and doomed to hide your beauties, and your virtues, beneath the pale of comfortless obscurity. Lady—oh, no, no! my cherished tender charge, I cannot, even now, forego the right of custom—renounce the privilege of habit.

Louisine,

Louisine, the tale shall be revealed, the veil of mystery raised: the last exertion of my life shall be to speak your rights, and blast the vile usurper. Ere I quit my humble dwelling, ere I venture on the fatigues of a long, long journey, the instructress of your youth, the mother superior of St. Mary's monastery, shall know the secret motive of my actions. She will receive—she will befriend my darling charge; and should danger—should death await me—should I sink ere I reach Lurenville Abbey, ere I supplicate the support of your maternal relative, the pang of dissolving nature will be softened, in the assurance that I leave not destitute the orphan daughter of—— I dare not add the name, lest the seal should be broken by other hands—lest the hidden tale should be prematurely discovered.

discovered. Louisine, farewell ! the prayers, the hopes, the heart of Du Plessis rests with you."

A fresh field for conjecture, a fresh field for wonder instantly opened to her view: every line of this inexplicable letter encreased, with the mystery, the desire, of elucidation. Again she perused, and again doubts and fears alternately succeeded. That her father had once known the ease of affluence, that he had fallen a victim to calamity, that he concealed the splendor of a noble name beneath the humble assumption of Du Plessis, she had often suspected ; but why the deadly enmity of the duke de Vermandois should descend even to his unoffending offspring, puzzled a heart so little read in human depravity—why the unexpected discovery of her mother's cherished resemblance

blance

blance should, in one glance, appal his courage, and overthrow his plans—why it should own a counterpart in the castle de Vermandois, and why that castle should have become her prison. Not for a moment did her mind picture dishonour, or shrink with one fear of imagined baseness; purity was not more sensitive than were the feelings of her father, nor truth more sacred than was his honour. Every advantage she possessed, could she trace to the early lessons of his affection; every virtue to the bright track of his example. Thus lost in the wild chaos of quick-crowding conjecture, erecting and overthrowing in a breath the idle fabrics of imagination, she continued in her cell, so deeply entranced as to be insensible to outward circumstances. She heard not the raising

ing

ing of the latch, she saw not the opening of the door; nor till a hurried exclamation made her start, did she perceive the entrance of an intruder. Then she looked up—then she beheld the shadowy form which darkened the door-way. It was a sister of Bena Copia, yet were the features unknown—features which the black veil thrown back partially revealed, and which, though pallid with the hue of sickness, wore the softened line of exquisite beauty.

CHAP. IX.

“—————Conscience!

Appalling mirror of man's secret deeds,
Thy true unvarnish'd page scoffs at the lapse
Of years; and spite of time's o'erwhelming flood,
Holds up as yesterday, the record, still
And deep, which human eye ne'er trac'd, ne'er dream't,
Ne'er guess'd at.”

LOUISINE, with dismay, gazed on the breathing statue; it spoke not—it moved not; the powers of exertion seemed to have fled, the stupor of apathy to prevail: the eyes were fixed in extended horror; the hands clasped as though by involuntary impulse. She could not fly from the cell, for the nun stood at the entrance; yet she rose from her seat, and as she tremblingly advanced, the spell of detention yielded to the effort.

Loud was the shriek of the sister; swift,
noiseless

noiseless her step, as she fled through the passage.

Alarmed, amazed, the trembling girl pursued the retreating shadow: she wished to whisper assurance, yet she knew not how; she wished to remove fears which her efforts could not fathom. —“ Sister !” she exclaimed, for she gained upon the flying steps of the nun, “ sister, stay and hear me.”

Fainter, but more piercing, was the shriek; “ God ! avenging God !” the exclamation.

She paused involuntarily; compassion, fear, superseded astonishment, for she beheld the object of her pursuit sink lifeless in the passage. She flew to support her; she raised her head upon her bosom; she threw back the shadowy veil; she gazed upon the pallid features, beauteous

beauteous in spite of the ravages of disease, in spite of the havoc of time. In vain did Louisine rack the powers of memory ; in vain seek to recognise the countenance—it was strange—it was unknown, yet 'twas evident some mysterious concatenation of events had excited the terror of the nun, or why so fearfully shriek at her approach? why at the sound of her voice lose every power of exertion? Alarmed for her safety, unable to awaken the dormant spring of existence, she summoned the sisterhood to her assistance ; and not till the fainting nun had been conveyed to her cell, did the slightest indication of lingering life crown their efforts : then, for many moments, languor mocked the palsied starts of terror, and silenced the shrieks of delirium.

“ Is it disease ?” demanded the lady abbess, gazing on the panting form of Laurette, “ or has any new occurrence produced this agitation ?”

“ Alas ! holy mother,” said the distressed Lousine, “ I fear, by awakening some untoward remembrance, I have been the innocent author of our poor sister’s sufferings.”

And then she was about to explain the unexpected intrusion of the nun, and the frenzied terror which had marked her flight ; but her voice, as though possessing some magic spell, roused the latent powers of exertion, and racked the suffering nun with the most bitter tortures. She raised her head from the pillow, and as her eyes again rested on Lousine, emotions the most violent succeeded ; cold drops hung upon her forehead,

head, and the laboured difficulty of respiration spoke the acuteness of agony. "Thou art come!" she exclaimed; "I see—I feel thee near—in my heart—in my brain—oh!" and her sigh threatened to burst her pent-up bosom, "that it is in judgment I have not to learn; that it is in condemnation I have soon to feel."

"Holy Virgin!" articulated Louisine, and she rose to approach the pallet, but the nun's frenzied shriek rivetted her to the spot. "Take her hence—take her hence," she implored, still gazing on the trembling girl. "Bury her, Montauban, or the blood will betray us. Fool! fool! poison would have left no stain—I am no murderer; why does she haunt me?"

"How galling is the burden of sin!"

said the abbess, bending her knee by the side of the couch, and piously dropping the beads of her rosary. "Daughter, the blessed promise of mercy brightens the dawn of repentance; the contrite soul dare picture pardon, through the divine offices of religion. Banish these idle terrors; recall the strength of reason; look upon the innocent author of your apprehension, and behold her, with forgiving meekness, waiting to join our prayers for your conversion."

The nun was silent, but her eyes still pursued the figure of Louisine, whose knees bent in ready obedience by the side of the superior.

"Daughter, perverse and ungrateful, recall this seal of obdurate perseverance, and let your soul claim the precious privilege of confession."

"Con-

“ Confession,” quickly repeated sister Laurette—“ alas ! can a sinner’s psalmody aid me ? can it obliterate the past ? can it—Take—take her hence,” again relapsing into frenzy, and burying her face in her hands, “ her sight is blasting ; she floats on blood—treachery—murder. Montauban,” and dreadful was the agitation of her frame, “ will you a second time betray me ? I have kept the secret, and yet you frighten rest—Man, not e’en the priest could glean the tale. Why should you doubt my courage ?”

“ Go,” whispered the lady abbess, addressing Louisine, “ frenzy baffles the powers of argument ; go, my daughter, and when returning sanity soothes the mind of the sufferer, be it my task to speak conviction, for terror magnifying

ideal similitude, commits a double injury.’”

Louisine quitted the cell; but the mother superior in vain exerted the authority of power, the incitements of argument, or the stealing conciliation of sympathy; each was essayed, but each was ineffectual; the nun, with obdurate perseverance, opposed silence to all her efforts; the indignant start, the smile of defiance, or the studied inattention of indifference, alternately succeeded.

“ Daughter,” said the superior, yielding, for a moment, to the impatience of displeasure, “ know you the punishment you would brave—the authority you would abjure? Within these walls, my privilege and my power owns no controul, admits of no restrictions.”

“ Use them—expend their force,”
exclaimed

exclaimed the wretched sister—"drag me hence—chain me—denounce me—plunge me into the deep cold den of penance; but there my lips will utter freedom—there my soul will scorn your threats. Mark me, holy mother," and she threw a glance of wild horror around the cell, "it was force—it was treachery which brought me hither. I am no willing captive—I am no self-offered sacrifice: sin stalks in the world, but sin drove me not from its haunts. I swore—I promised to await the return of Montauban, and because the murderer tarried——" She paused; she pressed her hand to her forehead; then, with a forced convulsed laugh, resumed, "No, no, good mother, I have nought to do with your jurisdiction; go, command your slaves; I—I am free."

Towards midnight, the fever of delirium subsiding, Laurette raised her head from the pillow, and looked anxiously around the cell.

Sister Lucille hastened from her watchful station, and approached the couch, hailing with joy the first indication of gratitude in the extended hand of the invalid.

“Have I been under the influence of a horrid dream?” demanded the nun; “or have I, within this very cell, beheld any being save the sisters of Bena Copia?”

“None other, save the friend of our favourite Juliette,” replied Lucille, “an unoffending girl, who, to escape danger and persecution, has sought refuge within our walls.”

“But did she not curse me?” quickly interrogated sister Laurette; “did she
not

not talk of murder? did she not show a bosom stained with blood?"

"No, no," answered the nun, "she whispered peace; she breathed assurance; she would have soothed your spirits, but that you shrunk with terror and dismay; and when you heard her voice, you bade the yawning earth engulf you."

Laurette shuddered—"Sister, are you sure she came not to accuse—she came not to arraign me?"

"How can she accuse—how can she arraign one she never before beheld?" demanded the nun.

"'Tis false!" exclaimed Laurette, yielding to a momentary burst of passion—"I tell you, sister, she was my friend; she would have saved me, but I shut my ear to her cautions, and my heart to her

counsels. Talk to her of Paris, and bid her remember the *Pont Notre Dame*."

" 'Tis eighteen years since you became an inmate of Bena Copia," thoughtfully observed sister Lucille; "at that period, Louisine——"

Laurette grasped her arm—Laurette gasped for breath.

The nun looked timidly around the cell—"Sister," she demanded, "where exists the new cause of terror?"

"Louisine," faltered Laurette, "Louisine! 'twas her infant girl. Ah! if she too escaped; but no, no, no, the plan was deep laid—the actors unrelenting." She shuddered; she buried her face in her hands, then mournfully continued—"Call her hither; tell her my heart, till now invulnerable, bleeds for her wrongs."

"Perhaps

“ Perhaps she slumbers,” said the nun.

“ Fear not to break those slumbers,” quickly rejoined Laurette; “ she wakes not to remorse; wherefore then should the hours of night hang heavy?”

“ Sorrow leadens the wing of time,” observed sister Lucille.

“ Ah! but not like sin,” fearfully rejoined Laurette; “ sorrow may produce regret, but sin *must* ensure reproach. Go, summon her hither; I will not start, I will not shrink at her approach: warn her not to fear me; tell her my powers to injure are passed. Yet stay, sister,” catching the veil of the nun, “ stay; perhaps to-morrow,” and feebly, through languor, her head dropped upon the pillow.

“ To-morrow,” soothingly urged sis-

ter Lucille, "strength and resolution may alike combine; to-morrow——"

"To-morrow," eagerly repeated Laurette, again starting from the pillow, "to-morrow—sister, who dares answer for to-morrow? Fate hangs on a breath; who then can build upon to-morrow? Summon her this instant, this present moment; bid her not stay to consult Vermandois. Tell her 'tis *Ermissende*."

"Alas! you again waver," said the nun.

Laurette breathed a suffocating sigh.

"Do, my poor sister, calm your agitated feelings," implored Lucille: "recall not the past: Heaven is merciful; and the contrite heart, deeply probed, may, through the divine favour of religion, picture comfort."

Laurette

Laurette clasped her hands; her lips murmured inarticulate sounds; and her eyes were upraised as though in prayer.

The nun sank on her knees; but as she pathetically breathed an invocation to repentance, the sufferer again started—again snatched her hand.

“Talk not of confession,” she exclaimed; “have I not told you man should ne’er glean my story? ’Tis all hid here,” placing her spread hand upon her heart, “and though the weight is heavy, resolution shrinks not.”

“Ah, would that resolution were exerted in a better cause!” aspirated the sister.

“Go, bring this Louisine hither,” exclaimed Laurette, regardless of the observation; “my strength fails, or I myself would seek her; but warn her, I

charge you, warn her not to curse me, lest my brain, already tortured, should again relapse in madness."

The nun departed. She found Louisine had retired to her cell, but not to court the calm of slumber, for she was watching by the sickly gleam of her taper, and musing o'er the incoherent wanderings of the suffering Laurette. Eagerly she attended the summons, and with all the solicitude of interest approached the pallet of the invalid; but the nun, the slave of memory and dire remorse, again started—again placed her spread hands before her eyes, to exclude the fearful recognition; again breathed with the frenzied quickness of fear, and again murmured complaints of the most heart rending sadness. It was long ere composure was restored, ere she could

gaze

gaze on the features of the distressed girl, without yielding to the most terrifying paroxysms; and even when reason brought conviction, despair and self-reproach mingled in each idea, and silenced every argument.—“Methought,” she mournfully articulated, struggling in vain to repress the rising sobs, “that the vision of the night was realized. Daughter, methought the spectre shade, which for eighteen long years has poisoned sleep, and worn health and strength in painful watchings—methought,” pausing, and again closing her eyes to exclude the o’erhanging form of Louisine, “the dreaded hour of retribution was arrived. Ah! ’tissad to know no change from misery, and yet from the silent grave to shrink in terror!”

“Repentance,” murmured Louisine.

“’Tis

“ 'Tis an old theme,” interrupted the trembling nun.

“ True, sister, but a blessed specific,” said the sympathizing girl; “ the privilege to pray——”

“ Pray,” eagerly echoed the sufferer, “ will you pray for a soul so lost?—will you pray your mother’s pardon? Say, will you——”

“ My mother,” demanded Louisine; “ sister, what know you of my mother?”

The nun heaved a sigh of the most heart-rending sadness; the question awakened a thousand dormant fancies; it recalled all the horrors of the past, and threatened again to settle into frenzy.—“ Curse me not—curse me not,” she quickly repeated; “ girl, she was the friend of my innocence; but in guilt,” her voice lowered, her form became

came convulsed, "in guilt I urged her murder."

Louisine shrunk from the poisoned touch of the self-arraigner; torturing was the conflict of her feelings; but compassion conquered, and pity bent her knee even in a murderer's cause.

The night wore away, but Laurette slumbered not; the review of self appeared her study, for melancholy was the stamp of her wanderings, and condemnation and despair mingled in each idea.

The nuns augured the most happy presage from the apparent change in the mind and disposition of the sister. The exordiums of faith no longer roused the unbending obduracy of resistance, nor did the threats of eternal wrath extort the smile of defiance. She was passive—

she

she was patient—she was apparently wrapped within her own thoughts, lost to time present in the revisal of the past.

Once more enabled to quit her cell, though worn almost to spectre thinness, and bending under the corroding gradations of disease, she evaded ever the eye of observation, and courted the most secluded haunts of the monastery. Shrouded in her veil, and folding around her the dark serge of her habit, she would often, at the close of the vesper service, fly to the cypress walk in the garden, nor return to her little cell till night had mingled every external object; nay, even then her pallet was deserted; in waking misery would she number the revolving hours; and when the morning dawned, tell her beads and pray. Yes, sister Laurette was changed; her heart, her

her mind, had undergone a revolution ; but, alas ! her weak, her worn constitution, but faintly stemmed the severity of penance.

Visible were the rapid strides of decline, but to no entreaty would she relax one infliction of self-endurance.—“ It is the anchor of my hopes,” she would reply to the precautions of solicitude ; and when the promise of peace was whispered, when the calm of sleep was proposed—“ Peace,” she would repeat, “ no, no, I have murdered peace ; not in sleep can I find it, for my pillow is strewed with thorns—thorns,” shuddering, “ which goad and pierce into my brain.”

Sometimes she would hang on the accents—she would court the presence of Louisine ; sometimes she would sink into forgetfulness,

forgetfulness, then, suddenly starting, bid her beware of the world, and paint its snares in the jaundiced colours of prejudice ; then she would deplore the first lapse of error, and mourn it as the fatal groundwork of destruction.

“ Daughter,” she would exclaim, placing her ice-cold hand on the arm of Louisine, and gazing with earnestness in her face, “ guard well each avenue to your heart, nor let your ear inhale the poisoned breath of flattery—’twas the rock of my undoing. Ambition chained my hand where my heart had no interest. Ah ! to be rich, to be great, to be dignified, I pledged the soul’s affections ; I became a willing slave, then slumbered o’er my duty, and lost the track of virtue.”

She shuddered ; she turned from her ;
she

she struck into her favourite avenue of cypress, and waved her hand to stay pursuit.

It was as the vesper-bell was chiming, that sister Laurette, quitting her cell, moved slowly down the cloisters; she paused at the approach of Louisine; she clung to her for support, for her limbs trembled, and her form bent in weakness. A more than usual paleness o'er-spread her cheek, and languid was the expression of her melancholy eye. "You are ill, sister," said Louisine.

"Yes, sinking, dying," faltered the nun; "nay, do not shudder—'tis the mind—'tis the cankerworm care."

"That mind restored to the calm quiet of content," observed Louisine, "would ensure the body's sanity."

Sister Laurette smiled; her smile was
ghastly,

ghastly, and the sigh which succeeded prophetic.—“Allay the storm, and the ship rides in safety,” she articulated; “child, quell the elemental strife, and creation resumes her colouring. ’Tis the thoughts—’tis the soul—’tis the seat of action.”

There was an expression of wildness in her accent, and faintly her cheek flushed the fever of agitation.—“Ah!” and she raised her shrunken hands to Heaven, “the heart is a strange—strange compound; so mingled, so varied; made up of hopes and fears, of joys and sorrows, of pride and vanity—*vanity*, mark that—and revenge and cruelty, and malice and hatred—yes, ’tis a field for speculists; but they couldn’t solve mine. Nay, do not tremble, child; I will not harm you—’tis man who deceives. Don’t
say

say you have not been cautioned : man looks the angel, even whilst he acts the devil. 'Tis a sad world ! but I've done with it. Come, my daughter, let's go pray."

Again she clung to the arm of Louise, and again she moved forward : but as the electric flash, quickly expended, dies, so Nature's feeble remnant of strength yielded to exertion, and ere she reached the centre aisle of the chapel, the faint and death-like languor of her countenance alarmed the sisters for her safety. Lifeless she was borne to her cell ; and there again the long, long blank of delirium checked the salutary progress of remorse.

Night and morning, for the health's recovery, for the soul's conversion, were the prayers of piety offered. Pity softened

ened the harsh fiat of censure; and though reason shrunk aghast at human frailty, yet did the tear of commiseration flow unchecked for the transgressor.



CHAP. X.

There is a strange disorder in thy thoughts,
 Something thou would'st unfold, but know'st not how.

ROWE.

Lost to external objects, scarce conscious of what he was doing, Theodore for hours returned not to the cottage. Tranced in the delirium of his feelings, alive but to the rapture of being beloved, suspense and sorrow were transiently banished, and hope and bliss furnished the fairy flights of imagination. Barely till now had he existed; till now
 had

had the privilege to breathe alone been his; now life was dear, was enriched by the solicitude of affection: he was enshrined in the heart of Juliette; he was cherished in absence, and gratitude chained e'en love with stronger links.

Ah! where was fled the forbearance of faith, the calm exercise of duty?—where the peace once centred in a religious cell? Theodore was changed: a thousand new, a thousand rapturous sensations rushed to his heart, whispering man was not created for misanthropy. In vain did he seek to controul his ideas into something like order; even on his pillow, the confession of tenderness banished every other suggestion; and when he dropped into slumber, the lovely form of Juliette coloured each beatific vision.

.. In the morning he arose refreshed, but not calmed, for honour and affection were at variance. Wishing, yet dreading the moment of appointment, arguing with his principles, yet scarce daring to trust to the strength of resolution, he watched the lagging hours of day; and when the golden sun yielded to the pale empire of night, fled across the park, and pierced the solitude of the hermitage. Throwing himself on the rude bench which had supported the form of Juliette, revising the scenes of the past evening, and checking each thrill of pleasure by the blighting remembrance of the being to whom he owed existence, studying the cold language of respect, and tremblingly anticipating the moment of enforcing its practice, he watched each passing sound,
panting

panting to hail the approach of Juliette. —She came—she stood before him—and the lessons of forbearance were forgotten. Her eyes were swollen; her cheeks were colourless; and her form, like the flexile osier, yielded to the storm of a father's displeasure. She extended her hand; she forced a smile—"My preserver!" she articulated.

Theodore snatched it to his heart, to his lips; he could scarcely breathe; and tears, the ready, the spontaneous tribute of his feelings, flowed down his cheeks. —"Juliette! adored Juliette!" at length he faltered, "tempt not my firmness: once I have dared—once, forgetful of the mighty distance fate has placed between us—once——"

"Twice—twice have you saved me," eagerly interrupted the energetic girl;

“ my friend !—my preserver !” and with a fervour which violated not the chaste rules of immaculate purity, she pressed her lips to the trembling hand of her lover.

Theodore shuddered—Theodore withdrew his hand. Hope, fear, apprehension, alternately swayed, alternately elevated, alternately subdued.—“ We must part,” he exclaimed, his heart sickening at the disparity of birth ; “ ’tis crime to pursue, but not to love you. Juliette, worshipped idol of my tenderest hopes ! we must meet no more ; you must fly the dangerous precipice upon which you totter. This moment, which whispers you dearer than vital existence, this moment decrees we must part.”

Juliette’s tears flowed—unswayed by the artifice of the world, bred up in the innocence of her own pure thoughts, she
felt

felt incapable of reserve—she admitted no plea in justification of disguise. Armed by nature and sentiment, Theodore had burst upon her view; and love, guised in the seductive fascination of gratitude, added a new obstacle to the ambitious policy of the marquis. Imperceptible had been its gradations. Unconscious of her feelings, she had cherished the image of her preserver, until that image had tintured every prospect of future peace—until it had established in her heart, that tenderness, that refined, that thrilling tenderness, which Heaven sanctions, and which neither yields to menace or entreaty.

To be parted in the moment when he again stepped forward a rescuer—the moment which betrayed him alike im-

pressed—the moment, teeming with generosity and noble disinterestedness, when sacrificing love to honour, he sought in flight to veil his feelings—her spirits drooped at the idea, and she wept uncontrouled.

Theodore was softened—Theodore was subdued—his knee bent in ready homage, as his lips tremulously pronounced the long, the persevering ardour of affection.

“And yet you would fly me,” murmured the trembling Juliette.

Theodore started—Theodore was recalled to his duty—“Lady,” he exclaimed, “I would fly the dangerous spell of your charms—I would save you—I would save myself.”

“Ah! my friend,” whispered Juliette,
“you

“ you have already saved me ; you have already awakened a gratitude, which can never, never slumber.”

“ You know not what you say,” said the distressed Theodore ; “ lady, you know not the being you so highly honour.”

“ I know him deserving every distinction, which virtue, which generosity, which humanity can claim,” rejoined Juliette.

“ Alas !” faltered the youth, raising his clasped hands to heaven, “ how sad to fall from the pinnacle ambitious hope has raised !—I am——” He paused—he shuddered. “ Lady, forget that you ever beheld me ; I am unworthy this distinction.”

Juliette gazed fearfully at him.

“ I dare not practise imposition, yet

to betray a truth so sad—Lady,” and he grasped her hand with wild, with almost frenzied energy, “you will despise—you will spurn—you will hate me.”

“Hate you!” echoed Juliette; “holy saints!”

“Yet are you avenged,” pursued Theodore. “’Tis true, I have betrayed my passion; ’tis true, reflection slumbered, and presumption dared to breathe the tale—ah! it was misery, it was the picture of your wretchedness which wrested it from me. Lady, I cannot pardon myself: one—one adieu; only one, most worshipped of beings, and I fly, not to forget, but to appease you.”

“Whither, and wherefore would you fly?” demanded Juliette. “Alas! this wildness terrifies. To appease, am I then incensed?—am I then ungrateful?”

“Oh,

“ Oh, no, no !” said Theodore, mournfully ; and he averted his eyes, fearful of encountering the smile which fascinated his senses.

“ Then wherefore would you fly ?” again asked Juliette.

Theodore darted from her—Theodore struck his clenched hand against his forehead.—“ Sweet saints of mercy !” he aspirated ; and then turning to the agitated girl, in the hurried accents of despair rejoined—“ I would fly because misery is contagious. Alas ! I am not what I seem. Lady, I would spare myself a confession which poisons every spring of hope—I would fly——” and fearfully he paused.

His looks—his attitude—all had an immediate effect, all saddened the spirits of Juliette ; the bright glow of hope,

dying on her cheeks, bleached them to the lily's whiteness, and her heart throbbed with the chill influence of apprehension.—“What am I to hear?” she interrogated; “throw off this fearful mystery, and reveal at once the tale.”

“Ah, lady!” observed Theodore, “compassion, interest, all will alike vanish; and even friendship will shrink from the claims of one so lost.”

“Lost!” repeated Juliette.

“Yes, lost,” pursued the shuddering Theodore; “from the first moment of awakening life, branded by nature with ignominy and degradation.”

Juliette gazed on him with anxious aching suspense.—“Merciful Heaven!” he continued, clasping his hands in despair, “the being who gave me life—the being to whom duty and nature stamps

me

me a debtor, has poisoned its fairest springs—has blasted every dawn of hope.”

“Your father,” murmured the sympathizing girl.

Theodore hung his head in shame, in silence.

“Our actions be alone our own,” softly remarked Juliette; “surely the prejudice of the world clashes not our fame with others.”

“Alas!” sighed Theodore, “if honour be hereditary, so likewise is disgrace; if birth reflects the lustre of ancestral dignity, how can the hapless offspring of dishonour escape the nipping slur of slander?”

Juliette spoke not.—“Lady,” he continued, “you behold a being, suffering, bleeding for another’s crime; one bred

to honour virtue, to adore the sacred rule of rectitude, to follow religion's pure and hallowed principles; yet snatched from those who pointed out the path, and doomed, by strange perversity of fortune, to mingle with a lawless band."

Juliette started; doubt and horror marked her features, as the night of her capture by the banditti recurred to memory.—"Blessed Virgin!" she ejaculated—and then, fearful of giving form to her ideas, she gazed on the youth in mute suspense.

"Hah! already do I trace the shuddering chill of dire aversion," resumed Theodore; "already——"

"No, no, you mistake my feelings," interrupted the trembling girl. "Proceed—the banditti—what of the banditti?"

Theodore

Theodore did not—Theodore could not speak.

“Proceed in mercy,” implored the almost gasping Juliette. “Tell me the fatal bond which leagues you with the banditti?”

“*Nature*,” pronounced Theodore.

Juliette started from her seat, yet was her hand extended towards him.—“I am the bandit’s son.”

Her hand dropped—her every feature betrayed the agitation of her feelings.

“Hear me, lady,” importuned the nearly frantic Theodore; “it is your compassion, it is your mercy I would claim; nay, even your justice, even your reason.”

“*The bandit’s son*,” burst from the pallid lips of Juliette, as powerless she

M 6 supported

supported herself against the carved side of the hermitage.

The youth sank at her feet ; he snatched her hand ; he bedewed it with his tears.—“ Lady,” he exclaimed, “ sin is not hereditary ; ’tis true my lineage is disgraceful, but my heart will bear searching.”

“ Holy Heaven, aid, direct me !” sobbed Juliette.

“ I come not to solicit—I come not to steal the dangerous poison of your clemency,” proudly pursued our hero : “ the offspring of Montauban would retain his honour ; the offspring of Montauban, in flight, would preserve that single balm to his calamities.”

He sprung from the earth ; he stood irresolute, his steps pointing to the
door,

door, his eyes rivetted on Juliette. Already, in idea, did she see him leave the hermitage; already, in idea, did she see him cross the threshold, and pierce the surrounding gloom; despair, horror, death, seemed to environ him—seemed to await the wild frenzy of his steps; and hurried on by her feelings, she darted forward, and grasping his arm, articulated—“Stay—stay, if my life, if my peace is worth preserving.”

Now indeed did the moment teem with danger; now indeed did the glowing transports of the heart threaten the destruction of the painfully erected barrier of discretion. Love spoke in the softened accents of the maid—love, the powerful opponent of his reason—love, the subtle insinuator, who bends the mighty, and derides the strong. Oh! where

where was the fortitude, where the firmness of Theodore?—where the determined standard of his actions? All—all fled before the acknowledged love of Juliette; all—all momentarily vanished before the magic influence of passion.

But though the saints had registered the vows of eternal truth, of eternal fealty, though heaven had witnessed the chaste acknowledgments of reciprocal enthrallment, still caution, the slumbering charge of honour, quick awakening, implanted in the heart of Theodore the goading thorn of self-reproach. 'Tis true he had forsworn disguise—'tis true he had declared himself the son of Montauban; but he had subdued, not supported, the strength of Juliette; he had awakened the sensibility of nature, and snatched from love the sacrifice of
duty

duty and of pride. Dismayed, confounded, sinking even midst the bliss of soft acknowledgment, every feeling of his heart turned to sadness, and reproof mingled even with the approving smiles of Juliette.

Life would he have relinquished to have recalled the moment of unguarded passion, to purchase back the secret of his love; but it was divulged, and regret was misplaced—it was divulged, and nought remained but expiation.—“Lady,” he said, pointing to the cloudless concave of heaven, “the Being who sees us both—who reads our hearts—who knows our struggles—now witnesses the remorse, the despair, which presumption has entailed. Confiding in my own strength, armed by the fatally trusted shield of imagined fortitude, I flew to
Perpignan,

Perpignan, to save you from the misery of Vermandois' love. I could have wished—I did wish friendship alone to have been charged with the interest of exertion; but I, unfortunately, have been the destruction of that wish; Nature has triumphed, and condescension has betrayed me. Ah, lady! 'tis for you to awaken from the trance of degrading clemency—'tis for you to assume the dignity of birth—'tis for you to spurn the son of the outlawed Montauban. Contrast your noble father's hopes with my lone prospects; contrast your ancestral honours with my disgrace; lady, does not alarmed pride kindle into hatred?—has not my presumptuous disclosure insured contempt?"

In vain he awaited a response; Juliette could only weep; his arguments, his
 expostulations

expostulations were all lost, were all ineffectual; the effort to renounce could not be essayed, for the heart combated against it. Long, painful was the conflict; Juliette could not withdraw her friendship even from the declared son of the bandit Montauban, for she was too generous to yield to the prejudice of opinion, and too much enslaved to regain the calm of indifference.

As she listened to the slight sketch of his "unvarnished tale," to the peaceful years of his sojournment at Valombre, her heart imbibed his feelings, and registered the mild virtues of his early friend; but when the mysterious introduction of the stranger diversified the inanity of his seclusion, then did wonder and dismay supersede every other sensation; though all gave place to admiration,

tion, at the sacrifices which a mind replete with rectitude and honour had offered to imagined duty.—“Blessed saints!” interrupted the attentive Juliette, “to abide with a lawless band—to brave the horror, the disgrace of such an association, in the forlorn hope of reclaiming a being so lost.”

The name of “*father*” trembled on the lips of Theodore.

Juliette felt the reproof, yet knew not how to offer atonement.

“What are the sacrifices of this world,” said our hero, “when put in competition with a calling so glorious? Think, lady, should I repay the debt of life by awakening repentance—should I snatch a parent’s soul from perdition—should I cleanse it from the stain of guilt, and lead it, contrite, submissive, to the
shrine

shrine of faith—oh!” and every feature lightened with the vivid ray of hope, “should I live to see Montauban clad in the garb of Valombre’s sanctity—should I live to hear Montauban renounce the world, its seductions, and its vices, then—then will calamity—then will fate alike be powerless!”

“You return to the castle de Vermandois?” said Juliette, with a bitter sigh.

“Yes, lady, I return to the painful exercise of my duty. I came to save you—I came to save Louisine; the one is in a place of safety—the other, ere I depart, shall be freed from Vermandois’ power.”

“And you go for ever?” sighed Juliette.

“For ever,” despondingly echoed Theodore.

“You

“ You mingle with a clan your soul disclaims !” resumed the trembling girl. “ Led on by romantic heroism, you brave the dangers of detection : perhaps reviled, perhaps implicated, your life may be offered in expiation of a father’s enormities.” Theodore shuddered.—“ Can not the voice of friendship save you ?” she eagerly continued, marking in the speaking countenance of the youth the internal struggles of his feelings ; “ can it not avert the fatal expedient ? Aid me, powers of persuasion ! and thou, oh, Gratitude ! become an auxiliary in the cause—aid me to soften the heart of my preserver !”

“ Recall that prayer—angel ! Juliette !—in mercy recall that prayer. My heart is already softened—my heart already bleeds.”

“ Then

“Then you retract—you return not to the banditti?”

“My father!” exclaimed Theodore.

“You cannot save—you cannot reclaim him. Hardened in guilt——”

“The years of iniquity are not prescribed, neither does mercy know a limitation,” interrupted the youth. Juliette crossed her hands upon her bosom.

“To be near him—to whisper the atoning powers of repentance—ah, lady! to mark the first dawning of contrition—to seize upon the heart ere sin again commands——”

Theodore became transported with the imagined realization of his project, and momentary joy sparkled in his eyes. Was it the casual start of envy? or was it love, jealous of his prerogative, who darted his scorpion fang into the once-peaceful

peaceful bosom of Juliette? Be it as it may, she felt a sensation of new, of torturing import—a sensation which added bitterness to her already wounded feelings, and betrayed itself, as with unguarded spirit she exclaimed—“Go; and may the being for whom so much is adventured compensate the sacrifice!”

Though bidden, Theodore could not move; the very mandate he had solicited blighted all his resolves, and rivetted him to the spot. To see Juliette for the last time, to know her lost to him for ever, was sure sufficient punishment; but to part in displeasure—to be thought ungrateful for the blessing of her regard, was a pang which superseded every other. —“Lady, I came to save you,” he said. “In the hands of the duke de Vermandois, my power, my authority, once
consigned,

consigned, I go—I offend no more. But with me,” and his voice faltered, “with me I carry an affectionate, a faithful, a despairing heart—a heart destined to know no bliss, in the painful, the lingering existence of banishment.”

Juliette was softened—Juliette was anxious to atone for seeming petulance; and soon, in mutual conciliation, was hushed every ungracious thought, every jarring principle. We know not how far the protracted moment of separation might have been driven, had not prudence whispered the danger of discovery, and fears for each dearer self strengthened her incitements. Again and again the fatal adieu passed, and again something remained untold. Love coloured the sigh of interest; the heart’s unbidden flame spoke in a thousand lessons of caution;

caution ; and when Juliette reached the abbey, she was compelled to shrink within the solitude of her own chamber, lest affection should read the secret of perturbed spirits.

CHAP. XI.

“ ————Hah ! do my eyes deceive ?

Or, like an evil genius, does even

Here thy guilty emissary pierce, to

Steal me from my quiet ? Lov'd haunts, farewell !

Conscience and duty, steer thou the feelings

Of a heart, which from wavering dread, and

Dire irresolution, ne'er claims a lapse.”

THEODORE lingered in the hermitage, long after distance had closed upon the sylphid form of Juliette. He feared to tend her footsteps, lest the inmates of the
abbey

abbey should behold him; and more he feared to tear himself from the spot which had witnessed their adieu, for his heart sank at the bare anticipation, as though the last ligament of hope was severed.

To pourtray the wild flights of his dis-tempered brain, the alternate glow of exultation, and the chilling pang of self-reproach—to follow him through the heroic resolves of honour, and the quick succeeding bursts of sensibility, would be a vain rhapsodic detail—a detail which the heart may form, far better than the pen indite.

Bitter had been the sacrifice which honour demanded, yet had that sacrifice been made. In defiance of love's persuasive whispers—in defiance of the heart's warm dictates, he had renounced

Juliette, when entreaty might have made her his own; he had strove to arm her against himself; and to erect a bulwark to pride, had exposed the ignominy of his own descent. Yet was insatiate honour unappeased—yet did it reprove the momentary lapse, which had presumptuously disclosed the perturbation of his feelings. Discontented, agitated, yet determining to prosecute his intended project—to destroy the views of the duke de Vermandois—to save Juliette from the horrors of a compulsory union, and then for ever to tear himself from her presence—to return to the haunts of the banditti—to live but in the hope of reclaiming his father, and ending his days with him within the peaceful walls of Valombre, Theodore quitted the hermitage. The moon rode
high

high in the heavens, and the cloudless firmament was studded with innumerable stars. Calm and serene was the face of nature; no rude blast sighed through the clustering foliage, or bent the tall heads of the forest's pride. But his mind imbibed not the soft infection; tortured, depressed, it could enfold but the picture of his own wretchedness—it could linger but o'er the joyless blank of his own prospects. He held the ebony cross between his hands; he gazed on it till tears, obstructing the powers of sight, excluded e'en this precious pledge of gratitude and friendship. “Oh, man, man!” he apostrophized, “how is thy existence made up of perplexity and woe! how does thy heart, nourishing the seeds of sensibility, credulously ex-

pand beneath the rays of promised bliss, and fatally imbibe the consuming fire of its own destruction ! I go," and he buried the cross in his bosom, " I carry into my solitude the gnawing anguish of hopeless love. Already has it corroded peace ; already has it cramped the active energies of the soul. Ah !" and he raised his streaming eyes to heaven, " the whole universe has become a blank, creation holds forth no charms, for one master passion, one sole, one ceaseless object pervades my being."

He had passed the boundary of Lurenville abbey, and now struck into the little wood, which fringing the domain, separated it from the humble cottage in which he had found shelter. But ere he had proceeded many paces, he started

at

at the sound of approaching footsteps, and, the next instant, beheld a man steal from among the trees.

“By St. Jago! but you have led me a precious circuit,” exclaimed the stranger.

The voice was familiar. Theodore sprung towards him, and eagerly perusing his features, recognised the harsh countenance of Randolphe. “Holy saints!” ejaculated the confounded youth.

“Nay, call not upon the saints,” rejoined Randolphe, “but prepare to depart.”

“To depart,” echoed Theodore.

“Aye, boy,” replied the robber, “this very hour to return to Vermandois.”

Theodore’s heart misgave him—Theodore’s heart faltered as he listened to the mandate.

“The devil has again unhinged the firm mind of our chief,” resumed the robber, “and spread consternation and dismay throughout the whole troop.”

“Proceed,” said the attentive Theodore.

“When I quitted the castle,” pursued Randolphe, “the gallant Montauban was raving most piteously ; nay, calling, as you do, on the saints for mercy. By the mass ! once I thought only cowards prayed, but now——”

“Montauban—my father—my father pray for mercy,” interrupted Theodore. “Ah, righteous Heaven ! visit him with that mercy, in the blessed form of repentance ; cleanse him from the foul stain of sin, and teach his soul yet to adore thy power !”

Randolphe paused involuntarily ; for
a moment

a moment he caught the fire of enthusiasm—for a moment his eyes were half upraised; then smiling at what he deemed the infection of weakness, he said, “Toil on, my young saint, and you may yet make converts. Who knows but our treasury may raise a monastery, and purchase us the benefice of canonization?”

Theodore shuddered—“’Tis a subject sacred; a subject——” but knowing the heart he addressed, he paused, then presently demanded an explanation of the seeming mystery.

“That is more than I can give,” replied the robber; “the mystery and the solution rests with Montauban. I only know the ghost deals hard blows, if ghost it is, for we found our chief with a
head

head as fairly fractured as though a cudgel had felled him."

"Ah! let us fly! let us fly!" exclaimed Theodore. "Wounded—perhaps dying, perhaps vainly calling upon my name."

"Vainly, in truth," drily remarked Randolphe, "for you must have had good ears to have heard him."

"Did he ask for me? did he regret my absence?" questioned the youth.

"He talked of little else," rejoined the robber; "and when he raved of racks, and devils, and monks, he said one deed of reparation yet remained to aid him."

"And that deed? that deed?" anxiously interrogated Theodore.

"Nay, that deed is for you alone to hear," answered Randolphe. "When I
quitted

quitted Vermandois, the tale was yet untold."

The youth, grasping the arm of the robber, would have impelled him forward—would instantly have commenced a journey which thought had already executed; but Randolphe, less interested, and less actuated by impulse, chose first to partake of the refreshments of the cottage; and even then, reluctantly yielded his desire of repose to the eager importunities of his charge.

Thrice its usual distance appeared each tedious league, for Theodore pined to perform the duties of a son even to the bandit Montauban—pined to soften the lingering pangs of sufferance—pined to encourage each blissful intimation of remorse. Minute and ceaseless were his questions; but not to swell our page

with the unnecessary loquacity of Randolphe, while our hero impatiently hastens to the castle de Vermandois, we will, in few words, explain the cause of his summons.

END OF VOL. III.

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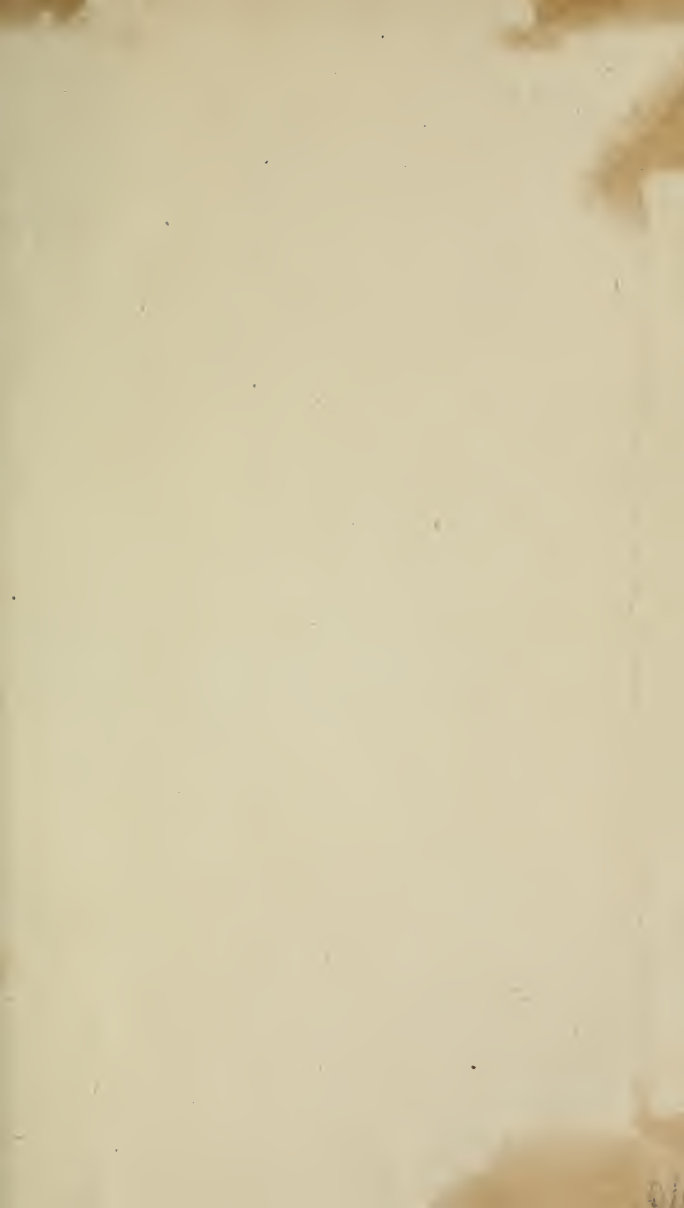
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